Trance-scripts: the poetics of a reflexive guide to hypnosis and trance talk

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TRANCE-SCRIPTS: THE POETICS OF A REFLEXIVE GUIDE TO HYPNOSIS AND TRANCE TALK

by

Katie MacMillan

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

July 1st 1996

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TRANCE-SCRIPTS

THE POETICS OF A REFLEXIVE GUIDE TO HYPNOSIS AND TRANCE TALK
I would have the names of those scribblers printed indexically at the beginning or end of the Poem, with an account of their works, for the reader to refer to.

(Swift, 1724-1731)
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ABSTRACT

_Trance-Scripts_ is an analysis of the social construction of hypnosis, looking at the way in which versions of hypnosis are constituted in various kinds of texts and talk. The analysis is reflexive, in that it highlights its own constructed nature, including how it textually constructs the textually constructed nature of hypnosis. Taking a relativist and social constructionist perspective, hypnosis is revealed (or constructed) as a discursive and social practice, in how it is realized, conducted, reported, disputed, theorized, accounted for, debunked, and so on. The analysis examines a range of written materials on hypnosis, including historical, clinical, and social psychology textbooks, popular media, as well as transcriptions of hypnotic inductions.

The thesis uses alternative literary forms (ALFs) as a way of highlighting the textual construction of its own, and others’, claims to knowledge, and of creating, caricaturing, and analysing through parody, the thesis’s topics. These topics include the connections between poetry, hypnosis, therapy and reflexivity proposed in the thesis, and also the standard uses of ALFs in reflexive work of this kind. Reflexive analysis is produced via a self conscious use of a metaphoric spiral, where analysis can take another turn upon a topic and offer another perspective. Thus, in a discussion on therapy, reflexivity becomes a therapeutic tool with which to confront and quieten the argument that reflexive analysis will result in an infinite regress. The presence of poetry in a social science thesis is intended to challenge conventional sociological and psychological analysis, in which poetry features (if at all) as some kind of social phenomenon, that folk called ‘poets’ produce, rather than being an appropriate and challenging analytic language, as it is used here. This abstract, given its contents, may be taking its work as a conventional abstract rather seriously. Time for the next turn.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

to everyone who volunteered to take part in my interviews on hypnosis, or allowed me to tape-record our hypnotherapy sessions. In particular, I am indebted to Ezra Driftworthy whose request for a poem sent the whole thing spiralling...

I would also like to thank Malcolm Ashmore for being my supervisor, for his humour, encouragement, optimism, and for believing in this thesis while it was still struggling for breath. The Loughborough DARG (Discourse and rhetoric group) has been of continual support, as a forum for initial data analysis, and as a stimulating environment for ideas and discussions, and I would like to thank all of the members of the group for their contributions at different stages in my research. I would like to mention, in particular, Sumiko Mushakoji, Jonathan Potter, Kevin McKenzie, and Mary Salway, and thank them for their encouraging comments on various chapters of this thesis. I would also like to thank Derek Edwards whose thoughtful contributions to Trance-Scripts have been at all times encouraging, insightful and inspirational. Finally, my thanks to Pat, my aunt, and to Rowan and Annina, my daughters, quite simply for being there.
Prelude

Hypnotist: And now, as your trance deepens, you begin to glimpse an image... becoming clearer now...

Subject: It's a spiral. Spinning against the sun.

Hypnotist: And what do you remember?

Subject: Each reflection.

*

This is for you.

You measure the distance between here and the top
of the mountain and the view unfolds
The higher you ascend the more you comprehend.

the shape of the rocks...
the sound of the air tending to the trees..
the scent of dust, crushed herbs,
the slow trail of resin on wood.

Sun makes particles of your thoughts
and
the sky
lifts up your glance.

The world turns and the words return.

And
something brings you back and beyond,
through the gates and over.

The sight and sound
of this image
remains
ever
turning
on

*
INTRODUCTION

FICTION OR PROPHESY: A Fleeting Dilemma

8th September. 1994.

In order to present my thesis properly Malcolm says I need to have an introduction. In the introduction I should make it clear what this research is to be about by explaining

1. How hypnosis became the topic for my research
2. How the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) influenced my analysis
3. How poetry got into a research thesis on trance talk
4. And what, I mean, for goodness sake, what the attraction is for doing this reflexively?

And I said — ‘Oh no! You mean I should make up some reasons?’

‘Something like that,’ he said.

Bearing in mind that we’d just been looking at my first attempt at a chapter¹ this seems like a daunting task of either fiction or prophesy. I mean, how will I know what my thesis is about until I’ve written it?² ......

[16th May. 1996.

Well, here I am, a bit less than two years later, concluding my thesis with another turn in the introduction. This time I know what to say, because I’ve already said it. I am now in the process of tidying up and rewriting the (above and below) ‘diary’ extracts, having already cut out the messy personal bits about my friend Dod dying that day, and

---

¹ Which, after many revisions, now bears only a fleeting resemblance to chapter five.
² In John O’Neill’s (1972) conclusion, placed at the beginning of Sociology as a Skin Trade, he acknowledges that he is introducing work that has already been written. In the same way, I can only adequately introduce my thesis when I know what it is that I have had to say. The notion that a thesis is written as a linear progression, from introduction to chapter one and steadily on towards the summary and conclusion, is brought into question by the presence of its own ‘introduction.’
the phone ringing, and my daughter playing the flute while I was trying to work — this, after all, is an ALF diary, not a real one (see chapter one on diaries as alternative literary forms). However, for the sake of continuity in the tale, the next brief extract will remain attributed to ‘8th September 1994’ as though it was still then, and not now.]

.....But anyway, Malcolm and I had also just been discussing SSK, and its analytical concern with the way in which the text gets to appear as if it is simply a vehicle for knowledge, and how this appearance is constituted in the text, rather than being a factual representation of the world. Knowledge, from this relativist perspective, is a version, a socially constructed account constructed through a process of negotiation. Well, since my thesis will reflexively attend to its own production, then, of course, it should be perfectly okay for me to introduce my research reasons as if they were truthful fictions, but then convey them ironically, as facts.

The story of this thesis

Now, what was it I wrote in the abstract?

*Trance-Scripts* is an analysis of the social construction of hypnosis, looking at the way in which versions of hypnosis are constituted in various kinds of texts and talk. The analysis is reflexive, in that it highlights its own constructed nature, including how it textually constructs the textually constructed nature of hypnosis. Taking a relativist and social constructionist perspective, hypnosis is revealed (or constructed) as a discursive and social practice, in how it is realized, conducted, reported, disputed, theorized, accounted for, debunked, and

---

3 The textual presence of fictions, as ALFs, calls into question the traditional dichotomy between true facts and false fiction, and suggest that such clear cut distinctions are unsound (Ashmore, 1989; Mulkay, 1985). See also chapter one.

4 Steve Woolgar (1993: 260) proposes that the use of ‘dynamic irony’ serves to remind the reader of the ‘fragility of the ironicist’s own account, how it can be undermined, and how this principle is not only applicable to the specific instance advanced by the ironicist.’ An ironic reading of that (or this) proposal might add the words ‘I don’t think,’ but, in doing so, ironically, this would reinforce the author’s statement about the fragility of accounts.
so on. The analysis examines a range of written materials on hypnosis including historical, clinical, and social psychology textbooks, popular media, as well as transcriptions of hypnotic inductions...

(Abstract, 1996)

Well, this story involves relating how I got from being a hypnotherapist, talking about levels of trance, to writing the above description on relativist versions. In my work as a hypnotist I became interested in the way that I would offer various accounts of hypnosis, with these ‘versions’ changing according to context and company. It would sometimes seem as if I (or we) was (were) making up the most appropriate description as we went along (which of course, from my present perspective, we were). My initial interest in fluid and variable descriptions of hypnosis was influenced by the work of Milton H. Erickson, academic, clinician and hypnotherapist (see chapters five and seven). Rather than offering a single definition, Erickson treats hypnosis as ‘a multifaceted phenomenon that entails a system of interaction between people’ (Zeig and Rennick, 1991:278). In contrast to his teacher, Clark L. Hull (1933), who proposed a need for a standardized induction procedure, measurable under laboratory conditions, Erickson stressed a permissive approach which recognized the importance of the individual’s ‘dynamically complex inner processes as they operated in hypnosis’ (Gravitz, 1991:38).

Although it is claimed that Erickson evolved his principles more from practice than from theoretical abstraction (Zeig and Rennick, 1991), there is an emphasis on theoretical principles underlying the proposal that the hypnotist tailor his approach to fit the beliefs and values of the individual patient. An Ericksonian hypnotist elicits a process of ‘inner resynthesis’ (Erickson, 1980: 38) within the client, through a process of building interpersonal responsiveness and guiding by indirect suggestion. While this approach may treat the patient as an active participant in his therapy, his therapeutic response is dependent on the way in which he utilizes suggestions that the hypnotist has made. As such this is still a clinician/patient relationship which assumes an (albeit humanistic) authority who will guide the therapeutic process (MacMillan, 1995). I therefore began to get interested in how claims, such as the suggestion that therapeutic change is ‘primarily to the credit of the patient, not the therapist’ (Zeig and Rennick,

5 Unfortunately, Erickson’s apparent reluctance to offer a single definition of hypnosis has now been incorporated into a single definition, by Zeig and Rennick (1991) and now by myself.
1991: 281), work rhetorically to convey not only the overriding authority and expertise of the hypnotist, but also the *author*. Ericksonian hypnosis thus became a focus for rhetorical analysis. For example, in chapter seven, I look at how descriptions of Erickson as a man ahead of his time work to deflect potential criticisms of his practice, and to rhetorically position the author as someone who recognizes, better than Erickson himself, the legendary importance of his subject (i.e., Erickson).

I began my doctoral research by taping discussions about hypnosis, including casual conversations (or as casual as the presence of a tape recorder will allow), open ended interviews, therapy sessions, and post-therapy talk, and started to look at the interactional work of participants’ discourse (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Mulkay, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis (DA) is concerned with the way that discourse (both conversational and textual) is rhetorically organized (e.g., Billig, 1987, 1988, 1989) and works to convey the speaker/writer’s actions and beliefs in ‘contextually appropriate ways’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 14). According to Nigel Gilbert and Michael Mulkay (1984), DA treats participants’ discourse ‘as a topic instead of a resource’ (*ibid*: 13), with the suggestion that, because discourse is performative, rhetorical, and indexical, analysts cannot arrive at a definitive explanation of the world through the participant’s talk. Discourse analysis examines the way that accounts are organized in such a way as to attend to their credibility and grounding. DA has its origins in ethnomethodology, semiology, and SSK (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1984), and has as one of its features a concern with how knowledge, beliefs, facts and truth are dealt with discursively (e.g., Edwards, 1991, 1993a,b, in press; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Potter and Halliday, 1990).

My own research focuses, not on whether hypnosis exists as a phenomenon (e.g., Edmonston, 1981, 1986; Erickson, 1980; Hilgard, 1974; Hilgard et al, 1978) or is governed by social roles (e.g., Barber et al, 1974; Spanos, 1986; Spanos and Chaves, 1991; Wagstaff, 1981, 1991), but on the ways it is *brought it into being*, in participants’ talk and textual descriptions (MacMillan, 1996).
21st May, 1996.

I’ve just been reading a footnote from my September 1994 ALF diary, and a quotation from Harvey Sacks (1984), in which he discusses his research. Another version of my research story could have been this one.

It was not from any large interest in language or some theoretical formulation of what should be studied that I started with tape-recorded conversations, but simply because I could get my hands on it and I could study it again and again, and also, consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me.

(ibid: 26)

Why hypnosis? Because it was there. And poetry? Yes, that too. But there is another story, and another set of explanations. It’s time to have a formal introduction to alternative literary forms (ALFs) (see also chapter one) in order to prepare the reader for the medley of them, jostling in this social science doctoral thesis, and in particular to explain what place poetry has in my research. First let’s go back to the abstract and its formal academic form form (FAFF).

The unusual presence of poetry

The thesis uses alternative literary forms (ALFs) as a way of highlighting the textual construction of its own, and others’, claims to knowledge, and of creating, caricaturing, and analysing through parody, the thesis’s topics. These topics include the connections between poetry, hypnosis, therapy and reflexivity proposed in the thesis, and also the standard uses of ALFs in reflexive work of this kind. Reflexive analysis is produced via a self conscious use of a metaphoric spiral, where analysis can take another turn upon a topic and offer another perspective. Thus, in a discussion on therapy, reflexivity becomes a therapeutic tool with which to confront and quieten the argument that
reflexive analysis will result in an infinite regress. The presence of poetry in a social science thesis is intended to challenge conventional sociological and psychological analysis, in which poetry features (if at all) as some kind of social phenomenon, that folk called 'poets' produce, rather than being an appropriate and challenging analytic language, as it is used here...

(Abstract, 1996)

Alternative literary forms, used in SSK analysis (e.g., Ashmore, 1989; Ashmore et al, 1989; Ashmore et al 1991; Latour, 1980; MacMillan, 1995, 1996; Mulkay, 1984, 1985; Pinch and Pinch, 1988; Stringer, 1985; Woolgar and Ashmore, 1988), reflexively display SSK’s concern with the construction of knowledge, and exemplify the way that the analysts'/author’s claims are inextricably embedded in the textual forms she uses to present such knowledge. Poetry, in this thesis, is used to problematize research and to analyze through parody (Mulkay, 1985, 1991) the presentation of information as factual.

Poetry is frequently and purposefully ambiguous, inviting a multiplicity of readings (see chapter two) from its various levels of meaning (Brown, 1977). There is ample scope for poetry to be read as social analysis (e.g., Eliot, 1960), whether, for example, with wit, whimsical nonsense, stirring imagery, or cutting parody, and so, when I was ‘deconstructed’ as a poet (see chapter two) in my meeting with the social constructionist, my first response (after collecting together the pieces), was to write a poetic rejoinder — a next turn at deconstruction. Reflexivity enables the analyst to return upon the sociologist’s description of the ‘art world’ (Becker, 1982), and to suggest that the ‘sociology world’ consists of the kind of things that a sociologist would say — such as art being a social and collaborative process. Poetry gives this next turn a new voice and another perspective on the topic.

Poetry is used analytically at various points in the thesis. For example, in chapter two, using parodic verse, I question the extent to which poetry, as an ‘experimental representation’ (Richardson, 1992), can be a form of sociological analysis able to say

A particularly just and fitting poetic parody by G. K. Chesterton came in response to a poem by Frances Cornford (1954: 20), entitled ‘To a Fat Lady Seen from the Train,’ in which she writes ‘O Fat white woman whom nobody loves, Why do you walk through the fields in gloves, ..... Missing so much and so much.’ Chesterton (1933: 39-40) replies, in ‘The Fat White Woman Speaks,’ ‘Why do you rush through the field in trains, Guessing so much and so much. Why do you flash through the flowery meads, Fat-head poet that nobody reads...’
something beyond the traditional sociology it claims to be able to supplant. Chapter four, the pivotal chapter of this thesis, represents and unites the focal topics — hypnosis, poetry, and reflexivity. The poem, like ALFs, invites the reader to take his own meaning from the text, while having a tale of its meaning as a trance induction (the ritual performed by hypnotists which is expected to bring about trance) told throughout the thesis, and in particular in chapters three and nine. The poem in chapter seven parodies the eulogizing of foreword writers, as a way of highlighting foreword rhetoric (see also Steve Woolgar’s parody foreword in Ashmore, 1989). Poetry in social science texts is more usually a topic for analysis, explained in prosaic terms (in prose). In Trance-Scripts the unusual presence of poetry as analysis requires explanation, and as such highlights the construction of a thesis, and questions the extent to which ALFs can be an alternative voice in a social science thesis.

The various other ALFs in this thesis include a diary (introduction), dialogue (chapters one and nine), plays (chapters two and six), letters (chapter three), a DIY manual (chapter one), an interview (chapter one), biblical descriptions (chapter seven), naming the subject (chapter six, acknowledgements to Ashmore et al, 1989), foreword writing (chapter seven), scene setting (chapters six and eight), a hypnosis leaflet (chapter nine), and textual therapy, trance inductions or indirect therapeutic suggestions (throughout. See also chapters one, seven, nine, and prelude). The apparent absence of ALFs in chapter five is noticeable (because I have just pointed it out) within this thesis as something unusual. As with the abstract I could apologetically give it the acronym, FAFF, call it a feature and, like the poem in chapter one, leave it to speak for itself.

22nd May, 1996.

I’ve just given in my notice to submit my thesis. It feels as if I’m preparing it for its first day at school. How will it survive, away from the comforting click of the computer keys, and the safety of the next revision? What if it isn’t kindly thought of, or worse still, what if it gets bullied? Will I, like the parent of an erring child, rescue it or abandon and disown it? Apparently I have to sign a ‘certificate of originality’ stating that the work is my own—a bit like a birth certificate really—which makes any textual disclaimers immediately problematic. And what will I do about Evangeline and Sybil, my
co-authors? Do I credit Evangeline Scribbler and Sybil Sleepstone with their work as poet, and textual therapist, throughout this thesis, only to reclaim single authorship in a 'certificate of originality'? Evangeline and Sybil, with their presence as representative other authors, deconstruct the notion of authorship and originality, and any claim thesis writers (including myself) might make to complete ownership of ideas in their text. However, it is such a claim to originality (and to single authorship) which will allow this work to be put forward as a candidate Ph.D. thesis. This is where 'having my cake and eating it reflexivity' (see chapters one and nine) comes into its own, and why reflexivity was such a good idea for my research after all, enabling me, for example, to refer to the problematics of claiming original ownership of ideas, while at the same time signing the obligatory 'certificate of originality.'

The reflexive spiral

Hypnosis has been introduced as the research topic of this thesis, and poetry as a form of analysis, which parodies versions of hypnosis, highlights the text as a social construction and deconstructs sociological analysis. A social constructionist perspective is itself a version, a construction, exemplified as such in the various reflexive turns of this text. In chapter one, in the 'do-it-yourself' guide to reflexive analysis, I link the metaphoric image of a spiral with taking the next reflexive turn —

[topics may be endlessly rehearsed, but with each rehearsal a different perspective is gained, as the text moves, not back to the beginning, but to the next turn upon the spiral of reflexivity.

(chapter one: 26)

In suggesting that the spiral is a fitting metaphor for reflexivity, I make a connection with the spiralling of the bird in the Spiralling Bird poem (in chapter four),

---

7 Such as this one. I am following in the tradition of the past (and a pre-Renaissance Western, pre-individualistic view [see Gergen, 1991]) and present, post-structuralist perspective which, for example, deconstructs the claim to authorship (e.g., Derrida, 1977) and proclaims the death of the author (e.g., Barthes, 1968).
and the spinning, turning and reflecting imagery of the 'hypnotic' prelude and 'sample trances' (chapters one and nine). The metaphor turns all topics together within the thesis, with my analysis returning at various points and from various perspectives.

Synthesis

The DIY guide to reflexivity, in chapter one, serves several purposes. Practically, it rhetorically displays the author's (my) familiarity with her subject, and serves as a basic SSK literature overview. As a 'spoof' guide it exemplifies the construction of a reflexive Ph.D. thesis and, paradoxically, the inadequacy of following mechanical steps in any reflexive work. The suggestion of chapter one is not to do as I say, but to do as I do. Therapy and reflexivity are linked together in an interview with Sybil Sleepstone, the textual therapist of this thesis, and her proposal that reflexivity can be applied therapeutically, for example as a way of confronting the alleged horror (Woolgar, 1982) of the 'infinite regress.' By reflexively exploring the fear it can be realized as a figment of rhetorical imagination, properly residing within traditional disciplines, and not celebratory reflexive work.

Chapter two consists of a play in three acts, in which the poet's deconstruction is dramatically re-enacted, and serves as a setting for contrasting perspectives on poetry, and other takes on sociology. The poet's version is a romantic one, in which the poem, like Ericksonian hypnosis, is treated as an effective means of unconscious communication, with the poet portrayed as a visionary who has access to a deep and prophetic truth (Cixous, 1990). The poem is assumed to have many levels of meaning which move the listener/reader in accordance with the message that he takes from the reading. In response to the sociologist's version of poetry (a social constructionist analysis of 'poetic mystique'), the poet uses poetry to analyze the social constructionist's vision of the world. This chapter explores not only the sociologist's claim to demystify art (Becker, 1982), but also the sociologist's use of poetry as an 'experimental representation' (Richardson, 1992), in order to question the extent to which such forms
can be as revolutionary as proposed, when poetry continues to be sociological data, rather than analysis.

Chapter three explores the connection between poetry and hypnosis (and a poetic journey into the unconscious [e.g., Tyler, 1986]), in the form of letters from MacMillan to Scribbler, which convey MacMillan’s search for a hypnotic poem. The letters bring into question how a poem gets to be treated, in various texts, as hypnotic, and in what way hypnosis can be considered poetic. These laborious steps, which include an examination of therapeutic metaphors, are the fiction of the creation of chapter four, the therapeutic poem, the poetic trance induction, Spiralling Bird. This poem, written at the therapy client’s (Ezra Driftworthy’s) request, is central to the thesis, contained within all of the chapters, and representative of the research as a whole. Spiralling Bird is an invitation to the reader to participate in the process of constructing a version of hypnosis by responding to the presence of the poem/trance induction as he sees fit.

Chapter five looks at the various ways in which a history of hypnosis constitutes the existence (or not) of a particular kind of hypnosis through a description of events, and/or previous misconceptions. What is regarded as ‘influential’ in discussions of influential figures throughout history, or as the origin of hypnosis, in accounts of its beginnings (offered as a straightforward representation of the facts), is maintained in the author’s accounts and by his own theoretical perspective (just as hypnosis as a social construction is supported in my rhetorical analysis of histories of hypnosis as versions).

History as rhetoric is further explored in chapter six in an analysis of descriptions of Franz Anton Mesmer, whose work on ‘animal magnetism’ is often cited as the beginning of a scientific approach to hypnotic (mesmeric) practice (e.g., Shor, 1972). Stories of Mesmer and his treatment of patients are frequently told as vivid and highly charged dramas, with attention paid to details of his clothing, his consulting room, and his patients’ response to his therapeutic administrations. My own lurid tale, a copy, a parody of such accounts, suggests the way that such details of the mesmerist’s clinical practice becomes a backdrop of supporting evidence for an author’s preferred version of what hypnosis is.

---

8 Or is set aside (in the same way that pre-SSK scientific knowledge was [e.g., Merton, 1973]), while the sociologist deals with the poet and the conditions of production. Rather than deconstructing the poet’s poetry, which would then, of course, have transversed into the realms of literary criticism, the sociologist treats poetry as something for poets and critics to define, and deconstructs the poet.
Chapter seven examines an Ericksonian approach to hypnosis, and looks at how evidence of the 'wisdom' of unconscious communication, and in particular the skill of Milton Erickson in communicating with the listener’s unconscious, is constituted in the detailed accounts of the various authors’ personal experiences. Descriptions of Erickson’s use of indirect suggestion transform ordinary everyday encounters (such as meeting at the breakfast table) into a session with ‘Mr Hypnosis,’ in which Erickson’s conversation and mundane actions are treated as imbued with hypnotic meaning. This chapter also details how reports of Erickson as a legendary figure, a man ahead of his time, work to convey not only his genius, but to position the author of such an account as someone who has a clinical/scholarly knowledge of Erickson’s work that others, less insightful, have not yet fully recognized.

Popular descriptions of trance often convey it as mysterious mind control, with the hypnotist making the subject behave out of character, and bending her to his will. In chapter eight I look at how media reports can both sensationalize this traditional view of the hypnotist, while at the same time appearing to provide informed and factual accounts of the phenomenon (such as — ‘hypnotherapy is no more dangerous than going to sleep’ [Daily Express, 1994]). In contrast to the view which treats hypnosis as a special state (in academic as well as in popular accounts), descriptions of hypnosis from a socio-cognitive, social psychological perspective place trance in parenthesis. There is no unconscious response evoked by the suggestions of the hypnotist, and no ‘amazing’ trance phenomenon. ‘Hypnosis’ merely is compliant behaviour, influenced by beliefs and expectations of what usually occurs in a hypnotic situation, and the shared understandings of how people, acting in the role of hypnotist or subject, are likely to behave. This version of what hypnosis really is is role enacted by Graham Wagstaff (1994) and his student subjects for a television programme on hypnosis (itself a sensationalized account, in which the interviewer parodies a sleuth determined to uncover the facts). While Wagstaff’s demonstration is set up to illustrate role enactment, my own analysis suggests that it is Wagstaff’s performance which pulls hypnosis off as role play, and which gets Mark, his subject, to act out not being hypnotized in a subsequent interview about his performance as someone acting as if hypnotized.

Chapter nine returns to the concerns of chapters three and four, and the construction of a hypnotic poem, the poetic trance induction. In this chapter the poem’s
introduction into the therapy session between Katie MacMillan (as hypnotist), and Ezra Driftworthy (as client), is presented as transcribed data. MacMillan’s analysis then looks at how the unusual presence of a poem in a therapy session highlights the way that hypnosis is co-constructed in the participants’ talk. The reflexive next turn, however, questions MacMillan’s version of hypnosis as a negotiated process, and suggests that there can be other analytic readings of the Spiralling Bird data which show that while the client may be checking out the expected procedure, what trance is directed by the hypnotist. In problematizing MacMillan’s analysis the reflexive next turn relativizes analysis as the analyst’s version of the interaction and gives MacMillan another opportunity to demonstrate ‘having your cake and eating it reflexivity.’

The introduction, written as a summary of the thesis, explains that the obligatory literature review has been incorporated into my textual analysis, for example, of histories of hypnosis, clinical manuals on Ericksonian hypnosis, social psychological accounts of ‘hypnosis.’ Gendered descriptions are assigned randomly, or refer to specific people or a particular context...

26th May 1996.

Now, what was it I wrote in the abstract?

This abstract, given its contents, may be taking its work as a conventional abstract rather seriously.

Time for the next turn.

(Abstract, 1996)

Well, this introduction.... Time for the next turn.

*
CHAPTER ONE

DO-IT-YOURSELF REFLEXIVITY: A Brief User’s Guide

Stage 1: Inside the thesis.
Stage 2: Creating alternative forms.
Stage 3: The form and content of the text.
Stage 4: Knowing your materials.
Stage 5: Telling your story.
Stage 6: On being reflexive.

The thesis should not be of unnecessary length
and
must be presented in satisfactory literary form.
(Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research, Loughborough University, 1988:12)

The reflexive doctoral thesis, using alternative literary forms to highlight the
textual construction of research and analysis, has, until recently, been a relatively
unexplored landscape. This area was opened to the public with the publication of The Reflexive Thesis (Ashmore, 1989), in which the direction of reflexivity indicated by the intrepid author is one of ‘R-circularity’ (ibid: 32). This perspective attempts to demonstrate the ways in which the author/researcher/doctoral student’s world is constituted within her textual accounts and the sense she makes of her data. Influenced by ethnomethodology (see Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984) and the sociology of knowledge (e.g., Bloor, 1976), Ashmoresque reflexivity can parry attacks from fiercely protective traditionalists (still defending the ancient boundaries of the social sciences), by suggesting that the potential reach of reflexivity has yet to be fully realized. This rhetorical move (see ‘Ghosts From the Future’, chapter seven, MacMillan, 1996) implies that the future is reflexive, has many voices, and places the reflexive student in the vanguard of a new wave of thesis constructing deconstructionists. Which, of course, is a good thing.
The following brief guide to reflexive textuality is arranged in Six Stages, created by defining the reflexive moves of 'Mr Reflexivity' (MacMillan, this page) as footsteps to follow in, and consequently transforming *The Reflexive Thesis* into a reflexive thesis — a beginning of a new tradition. As Ashmore’s first doctoral student it falls upon me to claim the self-elected, and almost certainly fleeting, responsibility of a disciple, ritualizing certain features of Ashmore’s work and thus establishing the ‘regulations and guidelines’ for writers of reflexive theses. This is an exciting moment in the brief history of alternative literary forms (ALFs) in the social sciences, heralding a new era of standardized ‘nonstandard theses’, in which ALF theses should be expected to include the text of university regulations, such as

The thesis should not be of unnecessary length
and
must be presented in satisfactory literary form.

It might be expected that, as reflexive theses become established, such regulations may have to alter accordingly. But in this case there seems no need; it is merely a matter of altering, by practice and stealth, what gets to count as ‘unnecessary’ or ‘satisfactory.’ As with all rules and instructions, of course, the following are certainly (and gratifyingly) insufficient for anyone to follow with any kind of confidence in the result (Wittgenstein, 1953; see also Winch, 1958; Collins, 1990). So they may as well be briefly stated.

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1 Discussions within SSK frequently present the constructed process of knowledge as a series of steps or stages, such as Ashmore’s ‘Six Stages’ of a replication claim (1983), David Bloor’s ‘four key requirements’ for a ‘strong programme’ (1976), or Harry Collins’s ‘Seven Sexes’ replication of experiments (1975), and ‘three stages’ in the empirical programme of relativism (1981). My own ‘six stages’ can be seen as a rhetorical device which aligns my work with eminently more prestigious SSKers than myself, and displays my knowledge of the area.*

*Footnote to footnote one: The rather obsequious footnote above is also a parody of a ‘stages’ style of presenting facts, and attempts to show the arbitrariness of such lists of information. The six within six, paradoxically, suggests that I might have written four/seven ‘stages’ consisting of three/eight statements instead.

2 This assumption of Ashmore as the model, paradigm, indeed paragon, of reflexivity might unjustly, though understandably, be read as merely an apprentice’s deference to her supervisor/mentor. This footnote, surely, acknowledges and disarms any such objection.
Stage 1: Inside the thesis

1:- The reflexive thesis should begin with an illustration of the way that what a doctoral thesis is, is constituted within thesis regulations.

2:- This should involve a brief quote from the relevant regulations pamphlet (the sillier, or more ironic, the better — see above).

3:- This selected quote is then available to be questioned for the orderliness of knowledge that it assumes by its requirements (see Ashmore, 1989: xxvi).

4:- And as such deconstructs the traditional form of writing in the traditional thesis.

5:- This deconstruction of the ‘standard thesis’ (as constituted within ‘standard’ academic regulations of size, shape, and body of knowledge) should be of a satisfactory (i.e., erstwhile unsatisfactory) literary form.

6:- Acceptable are the ‘alternative literary forms’ (see Stage 2. below) such as those standardly used within non-standard social constructionist texts and SSK.

Stage 2: Creating alternative forms

Alternative, or ‘new literary forms’ (Ashmore, 1989; Mulkay, 1984, 1985; Stringer, 1985; Woolgar, 1983) are reflexive textual forms which are used to highlight the construction of knowledge. This relativist perspective suggests that an analyst’s/author’s claims are embedded in the textual forms she uses to present

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3 The ‘new’ in NLFs is rather misleading since it implies a technique discovered or invented by researchers in the social sciences, when varied textual forms — such as novels as social analysis, or poems as parody (see also chapter two, MacMillan, 1996), have been around for a long time. I prefer the less ambiguous ‘alternative’ or (intimately) ‘ALF’, until such times as they are so well used in the social sciences and within analysis as to become part of ‘standard’ or even ‘old’ literary form. (See Mulkay, 1991: xvii, for a discussion on his preference for the use of ‘new literary forms’ rather than ‘new analytical language’).
such knowledge. By using ALFs as an alternative to 'standard' forms the author is able to

1: deconstruct the assumptions implicit within standard texts that there is a clear distinction between fact and fiction (see the parody/construction of the production of doctoral thesis in Ashmore, 1989):

2: self-consciously display the presence of the analyst/author within the text, and as such demonstrate the way that a writer's claims are shaped by the use of specific textual forms (Mulkay, 1991), while retaining an essential subjectivity (as opposed to the standard posture of 'objective' writing):

3: thus suggesting that knowledge is a process, implicit within the kind of writing used in standard texts —

4: imply a multiplicity of meanings or viewpoints through the use of different textual 'voices' (e.g., Ashmore, Myers & Potter 1995; Mulkay 1985; Pinch & Pinch 1988; Woolgar & Ashmore 1988):

5: and therefore declare that multiple readings are available within a single text (Stringer 1985), inviting the reader to step into the text (Ashmore, 1989; Mulkay, 1985), and partake in the deconstruction of the authority of the author (see e.g., Barthes, 1968; Curt, 1994; Stringer, 1985, on the 'death of the Author'):

6: which allows a further reading, a reflexive spiralling over the last move. For example, the 'authorless text' is deconstructible as a textual device (see MacMillan, 1995), authored in such a way as to suggest the 'death' of the Author. (Following Mark Twain, I shall try not to exaggerate my own authorial demise).
The writer of the reflexive thesis should utilize unconventional forms such as the reflexive process of doctoral thesis production (Ashmore, 1989), plays as sociology (Mulkay, 1985), diaries for reader identification (Ashmore, Myers and Potter, 1991), dialogue as disagreement (Pinch and Pinch, 1988), poetry as parody (MacMillan, 1996). The author should introduce her own unconventional, (un)satisfactory literary form in accordance with the regulations that the 'unconventional character' [sic] (Ashmore, Myers and Potter, 1991: 322) of her ALF makes visible 'the mutual constitution of form and content' (ibid) of the text.

Stage 3: The form and content of the text

How literally (excuse me) should the student of reflexivity take the notion of 'R-circularity' in writing her reflexive thesis? The answer to this resides in the structure of Ashmore's work (1989), in which, for example, rather than page 287 dissolving into a contents page, with a reflection upon its dissolution, page 287 actually does end. It ends this way —

"Zuckerman, H., 63, 115, 133, 240-41n. 17"

neither, in the final analysis, repeating itself nor going on for ever.4 By extracting the underlying form of Ashmore's work, and reproducing it as a set of guidelines, we can see that a reflexive thesis need not be circular either in its argument nor in its textual shape (— and is, more suitably, a reflexive spiral. See below). The reader should bear in mind, however, that the following guidelines are provisional and may be seen as mirroring The Standard Thesis, as an ironic reflection upon The Reflexive Thesis, or both, or neither. Unlike the standard text, the reflexive text should invite the reader to make up her own mind, while its author gets on with faking her death. (I do hope that all these references to underlying structures, Oedipal apprenticeships and death, are being read in the knowledge that this is a thesis on hypnosis5).

4 Another answer (see also below) to the 'problem' of the infinite regress is therefore 'page 287' since its existence as the final page of The Reflexive Thesis illustrates that reflexivity does not actually slip inevitably into the abysmal infinity. It is a bounded text, available from U. Chicago press for something under £30 ('hard cased' only. [Apologies to Harry Collins]).
5 They are now.
1: The thesis should avoid unnecessary length. Students should restrict their work to between 80,000 and 90,000 words.

2: (It is, however, acceptable to occasionally end in *mid-sentence* as long as no vital information is)

3: There should be a beginning and an end to the thesis, beginning with an introduction and ending with appendix, notes, bibliography, etc.

4: Chapters should be arranged chronologically, or at least autobiographically, tracing the (thus-constructed-as-such) development of the author’s work, (e.g., Ashmore [1989] begins with the beginnings of SSK and ends with the examination of the thesis).

5: The content of each chapter should be sufficiently different to justify different chapter headings.

6: The chapters should be of an equivalent (‘bite-sized’) length — between twenty five and thirty pages is the general rule. Any obvious exceptions will require an acceptable explanation (account) for the increased/decreased length (for example, chapter two of *The Reflexive Thesis* is an ‘encyclopedia’ of reflexivity, and as such is appropriately twice the size of other chapters, whereas the Introduction, as befits one, is a brief five pages).

Stage 4: Knowing your materials

Any doctoral student should be able to provide evidence that she is sufficiently knowledgeable about the methods she applies to her research material. In the case of a reflexive thesis the student should attend to this knowledge as a textual *display*, while
nevertheless displaying it. For example, Ashmore draws attention to his citation of Harry Collins's work as part of a process that constructs the sociologist's work as credible (Ashmore, 1989:3), and thus displays his (Ashmore's) knowledge of a history of SSK citation processes. And now, by referring to Ashmore's work as established within SSK, discussing his citation of Collins's work, and exploring citation as rhetoric, not only am I contributing to the process of constructing Ashmore's work as credible, but also am I displaying my own understanding of SSK issues.

1:- It may help to show that certain works within SSK have become foundational. (Ashmore [ibid: 3], using the 'fiction of a lecturer' to discuss SSK, offers a history of the discipline in which it all begins 'in 1969 [Barnes, 1969; Mulkay, 1969]').

2:- Offering a 'history' of SSK is a rhetorical display of the author's credibility. It is also a way of declaring the merits of SSK. For example, by describing the shortcomings of a Mertonian sociology of science and the asymmetrical study of scientific 'error' (and not claims about 'truth'), the author can then begin to discuss the more balanced approach (his own) of the sociology of scientific knowledge.

3:- There is an almost evolutionary sense of progression, as the sociologist traces this history of SSK from the asymmetry of the sociology of science to the more symmetrical studies of the sociology of scientific knowledge and 'methodological relativism' (Collins, 1981). The methodological approach of SSK enables all claims (for truth or for error) to be treated as analytical topics in their own right (e.g., Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Latour & Woolgar, 1979).

4:- Describing 'symmetry' as one of the 'four key requirements' of David Bloor's (1976) 'strong programme' can lead neatly into a further display of references, in

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6 Like Picasso, whose line drawings demonstrated his ability to do excellent standard representational work when he chose, the quality of the reflexive writer's work should show that she could have written a standard thesis if she had wanted to.
which the student may discuss, for example, various criticisms of the tenets of the strong programme (e.g., Laudan, 1981; Woolgar, 1988b)

5: including Bloor’s lack of commitment to reflexivity (his own fourth ‘key requirement’), (see Ashmore, 1989; Lynch, 1993; Woolgar, 1983, 1984).

6: By subdividing SSK into different areas of theoretical concern the author creates an opportunity to discuss various branches of the discipline. For example, Jonathan Potter (1996) has contrasted Collins’s methodological relativism and ‘The Empirical Relativist Programme’ (1981) with the work of constructionists such as Knorr Cetina (1995), and Latour and Woolgar (1986).

The reflexive doctoral student can remind his reader that SSK is a negotiated process between the discipline’s commentators and critics (Ashmore, 1989), and that the author’s text is one version among many (Ashmore, 1989; Potter, 1996). However, this does not mean that anything goes. The doctoral thesis, as a ‘version’, must be a credible display of his knowledge in this area. The story, if you like, should appear to be doing more than ‘just telling stories’ (Latour, 1988: 156), it should convey to the reader that, like the anthropologist, the researcher was truly ‘there’ amongst the natives (Geertz, 1988: 5).

Stage 5: Telling your story

To develop a reflexive form of nonfiction, one needs to write fiction (writing).


Ashmore’s data in The Reflexive Thesis consist of transcripts from his interviews with twelve British sociologists of scientific knowledge, and quoted correspondence with ten sociologists of scientific knowledge. The data are reflections of the theoretical perspectives and practises of those interviewed and as such discuss some of the perceived problematical issues of reflexivity in SSK. In the story of The Reflexive Thesis these data are factual, while much of the rest of The Reflexive Thesis is a claimed fiction.
The ‘fictions’ include ‘The fiction of the lecturer’ (chapter one), the ‘Dialogue between the Author and the Spirit Of Bertrand (sic) Russell’ (chapter five), and ‘The Authors Discuss Their Achievements But Are Prevented From Writing Their Conclusions’ (chapter six), and ‘The Fiction Of The Candidate’ (chapter seven).

1:- Such ‘fictions’, by their presence within the thesis, challenge the notion that there can be an absolutely factual text. According to Ashmore as the ‘[second] author’ (who is himself a fabrication), this ‘is itself, of course, an illusion (a fiction).’ (ibid: 196).

2:- In raising doubts about the absoluteness of Fact and Fiction within a text, the author can question the traditional moral dichotomy between true facts (trustworthy) and false fiction (untrustworthy), and suggest that all texts are constructions. The essential nature of Ashmore’s thesis is the work it does as a claimed fiction, in illustrating this constructionist perspective. Ashmore’s presentation of his data as factual, for example, leaves them available to be read either as fact or fiction, with their status as really either fact or fiction, in fact, a fictional red herring.

3:- There are ‘two types of writing: reflexive fiction and non-reflexive fiction’ (ibid: 197). The reflexive student is recommended to display her work as a reflexive fiction. These displays are frequently signposted with the author’s declaration that her work, or at least a portion of it, is an ALF (e.g., Ashmore, Myers & Potter, 1995).

4:- Wrighting the thesis. The reflexive doctoral student could use Ashmore’s ‘horrible neologism’ (Ashmore, 1989: 206) to display her commitment to reflexive fiction. ‘Wrighting’ is an invented word used to illustrate the construction, the bringing into being, of the text by the author’s writing and her production of ‘facts’ about the world. In this case, ‘wrighting’ self-consciously displays the construction of its own existence by its presence as a neologism.
(The author could follow this lead by inventing all or most of the words in her thesis, although attempting to explain the reasons for this could be a lengthy and tortuous process, resulting, perhaps, in total non communication. This is not, of course, a serious consideration. Or is it?)

Wrighting analysis from a reflexive perspective would involve the author attending to the fictionalization of talk, as it is turned into data, and the fiction of analysis, which, by its presence as a reflexive fiction, implies other fictions, other readings.

Stage 6: On being reflexive

According to Ashmore (1989: 32) the use of reflexivity as a term in the social sciences tends ‘to be subject to unsystematic variation.’ This statement of fact has the rhetorical effect of alerting the reader to the possibility of a selection of various forms of reflexivity, which Ashmore then goes on to provide.

The reflexive thesis thus may include a display of kinds of reflexivity, and citation of diverse approaches, raising the question of ‘difference’ and the possibility of further exploration of such difference. Ashmore, for example, divides reflexivity into ‘R-reference. R- awareness. R-circularity’ (ibid: 32), making a distinction between analysis in the social sciences being reflective because it is a study of human beings, ‘merely’ (ibid: 32) being more self-aware, and the reflexive sense making processes of members constituting their world through their words, as described by ethnomethodology (for an excellent example of this as a process see Weider’s [1974] much cited study of the residents of a half-way hostel. [Emblematized in e.g., Bilmes, 1986; Edwards, in press, 1997; Heritage, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987]).

It is the latter conception of reflection that forms the basis for an Ashmoresque reflexivity. Using a relativist approach to emphasise that knowledge is socially constructed, the reflexive writer may attend to the construction of his own text.
From a SSK perspective there is no distinction between the social scientist, constituting her world in her descriptions and accounts (as analysis), and the ethnomethodologist's 'member', constantly engaged in constituting the context of her own actions.

The general issue of reflexivity emerges in the specific area of the social studies of science, once it is recognized that the same point can be made about the knowledge produced by SSK. Its determinations, results, insights and so on are themselves the contingent product of various social processes.

(Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988: 1)

3:- What makes the reflexive story worth telling? And is this question so very different from one that asks what makes any academic text worth reading? The reflexive writer can argue this from either of two positions, conveniently offered by Bruno Latour (1988) in his discussion on 'The politics of explanation'. Latour (1988) subdivides reflexive writing into 'meta-reflexivity' and 'infra-reflexivity,' and in doing so constructs a rhetorical dichotomy which enables the 'problems' of one position (meta) to be solved by the author's (Latour's) creation of another (infra).‘Infra-reflexivity’ is presented as a solution to the unpalatable, unbelievable meta-reflexive text, and attempts to recapture the reader's attention by telling the story just as it is (ibid: 170).

4:- The meta-reflexivist could argue that her text, rather than being 'unfit for normal consumption' (ibid: 168), does in fact call into question standard assumptions

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'Meta-reflexivity' (referring to Derridean deconstruction, ethnomethodology, and ALF writing within SSK), (Latour, 1988: 166-8), attempts to get the reader to suspend his usual trusting belief in the authority of the text by 'adding specific parts about the way texts or discourses should or should not be written' (ibid: 167). This, according to Latour, results in an unreadable text that the author 'really believes' is a better, more truthful account. ‘Infra-reflexivity’ (ibid: 169-75), on the other hand, allows the author to remain reflexive, while getting on with the job of just writing her analysis. This 'just' writing involves making the text believable and interesting, while adhering to principles of analysis 'which are self-exemplifying' (ibid: 171). As Latour himself points out, and does not excuse, his own text is not self-exemplifying. While his text is very readable this contradiction (if we are looking for consistency here) might render his work less believable (Ashmore, 1989:60).
about the authority of the author. Rather than rendering her text unbelievable, the author makes it more credible with this rhetorical display of 'humility'.

5: - Whereas the ‘infra-reflexivist’ could construct her text as interesting and believable, telling her story as if she was telling it as it is (as Ashmore might have done in chapter seven of *The Reflexive Thesis* if he had not been diverted by the notion of telling it as a fiction). The telling-it-like-it-is device could be seen as a meta-reflexive version of Latour’s position on infra-reflexivity.

6: - This device, if unexposed, could of course be mistaken for unreflexive fiction.

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**Part turn 1a.**

If the red slayer think he slays,  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep, and pass, and turn again.  

(Emerson, 1904. *Brahma*)

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**Part turn 1b.**

*Death again — it seems we won’t escape it, either as a process or a topic. I’m going to use this reflective moment as an opportunity to suggest that describing reflexivity as a spiralling, therapeutic journey leads us away from the criticism that radical reflexivity has the inevitable danger of slipping into an infinite regress. A bit like fairies at the bottom of your garden, or monsters under the bed, you have to believe in the regress for it to be true. The spiral in this*

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8 Rather than critically suggesting that ‘as-if’ is a pretence, a consciously false fiction used with the intention to deceive (Vaihinger, 1924), I would prefer it to emphasise a relativist perspective in which ‘as-if’ is all there is — another claim, another representation of the world.
circumstance is not only the shape of the reflexive tool which enables more turns at textual deconstruction, it is also the therapy, like hypnotic trance, which enables me, as the hypnotist, to demonstrate that the monster (the awful infinite regress) exists only within our imagination.

(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).

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Part turn IIa.

The spiral of reflexive turns

As briefly described in the previous section, according to ethnomethodology it is taken for granted that a member must know the settings in which his practices operate, in order for sense to be made of his accounts (Garfinkel, 1967: 8). Steve Woolgar has referred to this as a ‘back-and-forth’ (1981: 12) process, and in doing so Woolgar stakes a claim in the sense-making that social scientists do, as they turn human action into processes through their descriptions. Ashmore (1989: 32), on the other hand, prefers to describe these accounting procedures as ‘R-circularity’, a circular process, and, like Woolgar, he becomes part-owner in the process of making sense of the reflexivity of peoples’ actions by applying terms to it. Furthermore, in taking another turn at ethnomethodology’s reflexivity, both Woolgar and Ashmore construct descriptions of members’ actions and accounts as being at issue and in need of clarification. As Ashmore takes his turn and redefines Woolgar’s ‘back-and-forth’ description — ‘I see it as more of a circular process’ (1989: 32), he, in fact (to be crudely empirical), suggests that his own description may be a good or better fit, and thus (rather unreflexively) constitutes reflexivity as the object under definition.

Both Woolgar’s ‘back-and-forth’ movement, and Ashmore’s circular returns have, embedded within the metaphor, a sense of coming back to the same position over and over again. Now, I see it more as a spiralling movement (since it is time for another

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9 As Woolgar himself suggests (1988: 23), the social scientist ‘produces knowledge claims about the production of knowledge claims’ and in doing so ‘aims to explain how explanation is done, to understand how understanding is produced.’ See also Pollner (1991).

10 See also Pinch and Pinch (1988) for a discussion on the reflexive ‘loop’ and how ‘SSKers’ (ibid: 181) should apply the principles of SSK to their own practices.
Another go at Better Metaphors for reflexivity, with the shape of the metaphor suggesting that each turn, however lightly made, however brief, offers a shift in focus. Topics may be endlessly rehearsed, but with each rehearsal a different perspective is gained, as the text moves, not back to the beginning, but to the next turn upon the spiral of reflexivity. It may be tempting to use the shape of a spiral to imply progress — for example, Richard Crutchfield and David Krech (1962) describe the historical process of scientific work on psychological problems as

a kind of spiral, a recurrence of older conceptions but at
a more advanced level of complexity and sophistication

*ibid: 10-11*

However, my image of a spiral intends neither a downward drift, an upward ascension (Tyler, 1986:133), nor a sideways shift. From my relativist position the image of the spiral has no bottom-line, no realist launching ground for a gathering of flight into the spiral. The imaginary fabric of the spiral turning within this thesis is all there is. (I wonder, if I let it lie, how quickly the next reflexive turn would be taken. How swift would my critic be to claim that my construction of the spiral as a more ‘suitable’ description, makes me as objectivist — however fleetingly — as those I have just accused? Have I forestalled that by taking this turn for myself? Have I answered that by asking it? Is this another rhetorical question?)

Reflexive study, and taking another turn at what has been written are ways of deconstructing textual methods of knowledge construction. Another turn can be taken on this reflexive spiral of analysis, this time by reflecting upon an example of a deconstruction of the process of knowledge construction within standard forms of


12 Realists, when their thoughts turn to flight, find an opportunity to misconstrue relativism. Richard Dawkins (1994:17) constructs an objectivist’s version of relativism (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Smith, 1988) in such a way as to posit its position as absurd. ‘If it gives you satisfaction to say that the theory of aerodynamics is a social construct that is your privilege, but why do you then entrust your air-travel plans to a Boeing rather than a magic carpet?’ This ‘tu quoque’ (Ashmore, 1989) argument, which pushes the ‘everything is socially constructed’ position towards its logical (realist) limits (see Feyerabend, 1975 for a reply to the realist accusation that ‘anything goes’) was countered by Robin Whitty (1994), who wrote that ‘Dawkins should remember that every successful flight in a jet aeroplane is actually an unsuccessful attempt to refute the theory of aerodynamics. Show me a complacent scientist at 30,000 feet and I will show you a hypocrite.’
writing. The following turn examines the reflexive claims of an ALF, such as how the introduction of such forms can extend the limits of academic writing, and asks what such a text needs to convey in order to be successful as an alternative form of writing. Using Discourse, Rhetoric, Reflexivity: Seven Days in the Library (Ashmore, Myers & Potter, 1995) as an example of unconventional writing, I suggest that what is constituted as an 'unconventional', 'reflexive', alternative textual form might not be quite as unconventional, reflexive or alternative as the authors assume in presenting their work as an ALF diary. This 'failure', paradoxically, successfully illuminates the problems of not being reflexive enough, and determines the 'therapy' of getting better by showing the need to go beyond the limitations of token texts.

How seven days in the library isn't quite enough

In their discussion on studies of discourse analysis, rhetoric, reflexivity, and the sociology of scientific knowledge, Malcolm Ashmore, Greg Myers, and Jonathan Potter (1995) present their writing in the form of an ALF, a 'diary of a fictional graduate student's 7 days in the library' (ibid: 342). The fiction of the diary consists of a literature review which aims, in its diary form, to reflect the progress of an 'ideal reader' (ibid: 322) who will emerge at the end of the week 'as a newly sophisticated paraparticipant' of the learning process. What we need to remember, however, is that the journey that the reader 'participates' in is mapped out by the authors, and that these writers are also authors of other texts on discourse, social constructionism and reflexivity. The initial claim therefore that the text (of these three seasoned academics) represents the naive explorations of a graduate student discovering the topics under review for the first time is not a hugely persuasive one. It is a rather blatant pretence, which invites the reader to read the text as though it is written to convey a point beyond the capabilities of a conventional text.13 My criticism here is not upon the pretence of the text as a diary, but on the authors' lack of reflexivity. For example, the potential

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13 In a similar way Ruth Herschberger (1970) uses the 'voice' of a female chimpanzee to complain that experimenters investigating the sex drive of chimps were contributing to an anti-feminist natural history by assuming that female chimps were naturally subordinate. 'Josie' the chimp, 'speaking' through the text, conveys a statement about human female sexuality, by the human female author, to her human academic audience. The text is not designed to convey a sense of real chimpanzee experience — that would, after all, be too much of a digression.
effectiveness of Ashmore et al’s work as an ALF is undermined by its lack of success in highlighting the authors’ reflexive construction of their own text, since the history of the text is disguised by the fictional construction of a fictional postgraduate’s fictional diary. The work stands, not as a reflexive fiction (Ashmore 1989) but as a token and non-reflexive one.

In discussing ALFs the authors declare that the unconventional text makes visible that which is usually hidden —

work stressing the achievement of order is an important corrective to “final versions” that deny their own production conditions

(ibid: 322).

However, the authors’ diary, like the standard text it criticizes, also obscures its process of production, unreflexively giving us the final, tidied up version, the one that got published in an academic text (with the future reference citation and the ‘About the Authors’ information involving Ashmore, Myers and Potter, the real authors, and not the imaginary student as the spoof author). In order for an ALF to ‘bite’, that is to be more persuasive than a standard text, the authors’ diary should exhibit that which it claims to leave exposed — the construction of the text. This, in Seven Days in the Library, might have included the interchanges (and disputes?) between the three authors, the messiness of draft versions, traces of how they turned what might have been a straight-forward review into a ‘diary’, notes and corrections, various exchanges with reviewers and/or editors of the Handbook, reactions to editors’ comments, and so forth.

Instead the ALF is a token one written without reflexive attention to the authors’ own claims within their text. The diary remains little more than a literature review, conveying much the same kind of information as any standard academic literature reviews, informing the reader about the topic and content of the books under inspection. Although the authors’ diary might propose to reflexively illustrate the ‘mutual constitution of form and content’ within the text (ibid: 322), ironically, the creative process that the reader is privy to is the fiction of diary writing, and no insight whatsoever into the ways in which the three authors’ collaborative writing got worked
up into a univocal diary-like form. The non-reflexive writing of the three authors attends to reflexivity only as a token, and as such is barely more reflexive than the conventional forms of writing it claims to go beyond.

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Part turn IIb.
The spiral of reflexive trance

Reflexivity, like hypnotherapy, has various levels. Some dabble near the surface, dipping into reflexive moments, flirting with the images evoked in the reflection, before returning to the safety of the mundane. Others attempt to confront the fear of the monster lurking in the abyss by descending into the deeper realms of reflexivity. It is those who confront the beast who will truly know what is there, in the dark beyond.

Reflect
On this
As you spin
Down
Down deep
within.

You will come upon places
You may have visited before, and something’s changed.
You are intrigued to find that your attention is so clear, and so focused that it’s as if you are seeing anew, seeing from a fresh and vital perspective.
Boundaries, if there ever were such bounded places, have slipped back, receded into insignificance.
The world as imagined is as solid
as the reflection in a still pool.
The clarity of such stillness
is astonishing.

(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).

*  

Part turn IIIa.
Therapy and the infinite regress

One of the imagined horrors of taking another turn on the reflexive spiral is that it will suddenly start spinning, with the researcher helplessly caught up in a whirlpool of analysis in which he writes about his studies of studies about studies about studies ad infinitum (ad nauseam), ending up with an analysis to which the reader shrugs and says 'so what' as she closes the pages. Furthermore, the reflexive constructionist perspective, in exposing the construction of the text, could be viewed as undermining the strength of its own position, since deconstruction can clearly be applied to itself, with the researcher's analysis deconstructing (decomposing) before the ink has dried upon the page. This 'tu quoque' argument (see Ashmore, 1989) would suggest that the infinite regress is a potential problem for radical reflexivity (Cuff et al, 1979) and research which is concerned with the construction of knowledge and which uses its own text as the exemplifying subject. While the fear of the infinite regress echoes a(n 'ideal type') researcher's concern that her research should have something lastingly interesting to say, reflexive writing has topicalized this concern, embracing it in the shape of a monster. 

14 Conversely, doing reflexivity properly in the first place might have prevented this historical fear of subjective regress. Roy Wagner (1991: 40) suggests that had Descartes carried his philosophical reflexivity cogito, ergo sum to its 'logical conclusion, cogito me cogitans, ergo sum, "I think myself thinking, therefore I am," he might have exorcised the murky demons of subjectivity and spared the world three hundred years of object-fetishism.'
‘methodological horror’ (Woolgar, 1982; 1988b), and drawing it into the heart of reflexivity (Woolgar, 1982). This has been done in a variety of ways: for example by showing how the monster can be kept at bay (Woolgar, 1982); by suggesting it is best ignored (Potter & Wetherell, 1987); by confronting and celebrating its existence (Ashmore, 1989); by proposing that it exists as a figment of the rhetorical imagination (MacMillan, this chapter). Indeed such perspectives keep the monster alive, either by declaring it a feature of reflexive writing, or a horror to be kept under control.

A figment of rhetorical imagination

The monster of reflexivity, whether it is to be kept at bay, ignored, celebrated or banished through therapeutic intervention (see below), is brought into existence by the speaker/author, and has no life outside the word/text. It is a tame, straw (plastic?15) monster, built within rhetorical accounts of how to manage it.

In the following extract, transcribed from a video taped interview conducted with Sybil Sleepstone, the textual therapist shows how the monster can be discussed in terms of therapy, ‘revealing’ it as a spectre arising from unconscious fears of the unknown. Sleepstone’s technique celebrates the monster long enough to show that it is an imaginary one which may be vanquished in the turn of a page. Her therapeutic method assumes that there is a healthier textual position, in which the confidence of the writer can lead us into the realms of the unknown, creating a map of the journey there and beyond. For Sleepstone the student of reflexivity is frequently crippled by an initial fear, stemming from dire warnings about the infinite regress. Her task, as she sees it, is to help overcome this fear, through therapeutic intervention.

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15 And yet, like Godzilla who returns again and yet again, this monster keeps coming back to haunt us, symbolic of our deep-seated fears, dreams and regressive nightmares.
[ Ethnographic note: Although Sybil Sleepstone has been a practising speed boat racer for a number of years, she does not collect railway tickets, phone numbers or umbrellas. For this interview she appeared to have tied her shoelaces back to front (they were dark brown), and spoke without a lisp. ]

M. Can you explain what being a 'textual therapist' involves?

S. Yeah. Um. It requires me to enter the text — as though it were a client's unconscious — and to reveal what is going on, in therapeutic terms. After we have uncovered the reasons for the 'pathology' [clears throat], excuse me, the roots of the textual distress, we can then proceed with the therapeutic intervention, in order to bring about the desired change.

M. And what would that change involve?

S. Desirable textual change is a resolution of conflicts. However, even as the conflicts constitute the problem, so they often also constitute the resolve.

M. Um. Sorry?

S. Well, for example, Milton Erickson, the hypnotherapist, frequently prescribed the client's problem (i.e. that they keep on doing what they've been doing) as a way of affecting a cure. In Uncommon Therapy Jay Haley [(1973)] quotes and discusses some of Erickson's case histories. Um, there is one in particular that springs to mind. Hang on, let's have a proper look at it.

[Sleepstone goes to bookshelf, selects a book and sits down].
S. It's about a sixteen year old girl who exasperates her parents with her habit of sucking her thumb [she turns the pages]. Ah! [and begins to read]...

The girl came unwillingly to the office with her parents. She was nursing her thumb noisily. I dismissed her parents and turned to face the girl. She removed her thumb sufficiently to declare she didn’t like ‘nut doctors.’

I replied, ‘And I don’t like the way your parents ordered me to cure your thumbsucking. Ordering me, huh! It’s your thumb and your mouth, and why in hell can’t you suck it if you want to? Ordering me to cure you! The only thing I’m interested in is why, when you want to be aggressive about thumbsucking, you don’t really get aggressive instead of piddling around like a baby that doesn’t know how to suck your thumb aggressively. What I’d like to do is to tell you how to suck your thumb aggressively enough to irk the hell out of your old man and your old lady.’

[(ibid: 195)]

[Sleepstone closes the book and smiles]

M. And what happens?

S. After a bit of deliberate and irritating thumbsucking she starts to get involved in teenage activities. In other words, she grows up and leaves thumbsucking behind.

M. Fascinating. But where does this connect with textual therapy?
I'm assuming you're here to interview me on the textual therapy I recently performed on the horror of the infinite regress?

[MacMillan nods]

Well, just as Malcolm Ashmore [(1989)] recommends a fearless celebration of the monster by topicalizing its presence, and Milton Erickson topicalizes thumbsucking behaviour in order to bring it under conscious control, so I topicalize the fear of the infinite regress (and prescribe imaginary regression) in order to bring about the therapeutic solution. Now there are two distinct arguments I have involving the infinite regress. One, which I will come back to later, involves circularity and traditional research. The other involves the accusations levelled at reflexivity. Think about it. The word regression has criticism constituted within it. You just have to say 'regress' and before you've said anything else, you've implied this sense of going backwards. No wonder it seems so fearful, if, as a reflexive writer you are in danger of having your work interpreted as potentially backward — not as static, not as not going anywhere, not even as a shrug-and-a-so-what kind of work. Worse. Reflexive work might actually be accused of — what is it Windy Dryden says about psychological regression in therapy? Um, 'retreating to a former developmental stage' [(1984:31)]. Thus 'regress' as a word, has immediately negative connotations, not only in common sense terms, but also psychologically and therapeutically. However, and here we have the therapeutic flip side in a word, it is also a psychoanalytic technique which can be used to affect a cure. What the student needs to do, to see if his work is a 'retreat,' is to do it — to go into regression. Thus, in order to be free of the crippling fear of falling into the abyss of reflexive research, the reflexive writer should take a look at the monster for himself, and see that another twist need not go backwards, nor for ever.

How can students of reflexivity go into a regress that isn’t there?
S. Is psychological regression really there? The infinite regress is neither more nor less 'there' than psychological regression. Therapeutic regression, in hypnosis, involves a reflection upon the unconscious, and a sense of journeying into the past to the beginnings of the trauma. The client does not really go back, I mean physically, into the past, does he? Well, in textual regression the student of reflexivity can examine the imaginary infinite regress in order to find out that, of course, it cannot really happen. Not only is it a practical impossibility [(Ashmore, 1989)], it exists only within the textual imagination. The cure is not so much a case of ignoring the monster and being able 'simply to get on with it' [(Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 182)] — which might sound a bit like whistling in the dark — but knowing that it is brought into being as a rhetorical device, summoned into the argument, and then banished.

M. Just like you're doing now?

[Sleepstone nods, grinning].

M. Where did the inspiration to do textual therapy come from?

S. I'm so glad you called it inspiration. Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar [(1986)] have this lovely five-stage model which they call the 'splitting and inversion model of discovery' which is a blatant piece of textual psychoanalysis.

[MacMillan splutters, surprised by Sleepstone's incongruous description of these researchers, well known for their work within the sociology of scientific knowledge, but not for any connections with psychoanalysis.]

S. Are you all right? Well, they've got these basically Freudian principles black boxed16 within their assumption that that which is black boxed has been repressed or denied, and is brought back to consciousness only through the skilful analysis

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16 'When many elements are made to act as one, this is what I will call a black box' (Latour, 1987:131).
of the sociologist of scientific knowledge. As analysts Latour and Woolgar expose the scientists in the rhetorical act of reality construction, while at the same time displaying themselves as having revealed what really happened in the formation of factual information. In therapeutic terms, having broken through the resistance of fact construction concealment, the analysts are able to show what is happening in the unconscious depths of their first three stages. Therefore a further stage implicit within Latour and Woolgar’s work is a therapeutic realization of previous patterns which thus leads to a new perception of the social world. Now, if we utilize the authors’ own metaphoric description of their topic, we may be able to gain a greater empathic understanding of their perception of the construction of knowledge. This way we can, once again, open the black box, this time to reveal that which the authors have repressed — the splitting and inversion of a psychoanalytic construct, that is, the model of the unconscious in its guise as a black box.

M. I’m not quite sure....

S. Look, I’ve worked it out in terms of ‘stages.’

[Sleepstone takes a document from her desk drawer].

S. This should show you how it works. Right, in the first stage we have the documentation of the object. Okay?

[Points to piece of paper. MacMillan peers at it and nods].

S. The document is used in order to reveal the ‘discovery’ of the object. Here [pointing], stage two. In the third stage the object is seen to exist independently of the document. Its existence is now assumed as fact. The next stage (four), implies an inversion occurs in the relationship between the document and the object. This is where the reality of the object excites further research and documentation. Different perspectives are now offered without questioning the
existence of the object. In the final stage of Latour and Woolgar’s model they propose that stages 1-3 become lost within the process of discovery. Hidden in the metaphoric black box. Okay, so this is what the authors themselves have documented. We could tack on some more stages if we were so inclined, particularly the one where the SSKer comes along and documents the facts about what really happens in constructing facts (stage six if you like), which then gets cited in other texts as what happens in the historical construction of facts. And here am I, waving my own documentation about.

M. Yeah [said slowly and thoughtfully].

S. This is the image of the spiral at work again. Well, Latour and Woolgar’s unintentional (I think) psychoanalysis on blackboxing got me interested in textual therapy as a way of showing how therapeutic reflexivity can be. A reflection on how these apparently solid facts about the world come into being as solid facts shows how your own assumptions, within research for example, shape (and therefore restrict) the direction of your work. If you like I’ll do some therapy on your text, this thesis, sort it out a bit. When you are distracted and reflecting upon something else, I’ll nip into the text, plant a few hypnotic suggestions, and enable you to access the real reflexive truth about your research...

M. [hastily] And what was the other point you said you had to make, you know, about tradition and circularity.

S. Ah, right. Now, the other bit of this therapeutic argument is that what you see in others is a reflection upon yourself — a kind of projection. Thus, when more traditional disciplines turn to reflexivity and state that it sees nothing beyond its own navel, they are, of course, talking about themselves. The traditional social scientist is restricted to a kind of theoretical circularity by the confines of his own approach and the assumptions which form the boundaries he shall never cross. The discipline is a bit like a comfortable neurosis which will resist change at all costs. This is why there is such ferocious response to other approaches which
might in some way contaminate the discipline if not repressed. Reflexivity, in some ways, is the worst threat of all, because it demands that the researcher confront her own moves and motives.

M. So the infinite regress is a feature of textual imagination, a fear of the unknown, and not so much a feature of reflexivity, as an accusation directed at reflexivity by traditional social science, which actually reflects the shape of standard research? Can it be all of these things at once?

S. Yes. If you like I’ll tell it like a story, beginning with traditional research accusing reflexivity of circularity. This then becomes a real consideration by researchers using reflexivity, and by taking it seriously (as we’ve seen in Latour and Woolgar’s five-stage model) it kind of brings it into being. This proposed danger takes the shape of the monster requiring textual attention, and finally, it becomes part of the therapy, (like thumb-sucking to cure thumb-sucking). What therapeutic reflexivity reveals are the underlying processes of monster creation, and of course, the therapeutic resolve. Now, what I’ve been itching to ask you, is to what extent your doctoral thesis is going to be hypnotic. I mean, are you going to reflexively display the methods of trance induction and therapy in your text, so that your reader becomes involved in some of the alleged trance experiences...

[At this point the discussion switches from a MacMillan interview with Sleepstone on reflexivity, to a Sleepstone interview with MacMillan on hypnotic texts.]

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The various reflexive turns in this chapter, in response to anxieties of an infinite regress, practically demonstrate both how the spiral of reflecting upon reflexive research does not shape, after all, into a regress, and how reflexivity 'bites' as an analytical tool. In presenting a 'do-it-yourself guide' to reflexivity, as a reflexive analysis of the construction of a reflexive thesis, I would suggest that my own work is not a backward glance into what is already known, but a parody of reflexive research (which claims to reveal the ways in which facts about the world get constituted in and by conventional texts). This spoof easy user's guide to reflexivity plays on the notion that unconventional may become convention by following (in) the (foot)steps of (Mr.) reflexivity, and Ashmore (1989), (as outlined by MacMillan, this chapter). This reflection teases 'unconventional' as that which, through the very process of knowledge construction that SSK describes, can become a convention of reflexive texts, and as such is in danger of being used as a token. In this way the 'unstandard' text gets to be so similar to a 'standard' text, that, ironically, it cancels out its own critical effectiveness.

The DIY guide offers, as an example of reflexive research, my own instantiation of reflexivity as therapy, as I use reflexivity in order to weave the elements of my research into mutually reflecting textual forms. For example, the textual therapy of Sybil Sleepstone is demonstrated in her brief hypnotic suggestions (part turn IIb), within this chapter. The sample trance somehow slipped into the thesis without conscious intent, and now remains as an example of 'unconscious communication' to be read, or ignored, as such. However, the presence of a textual ALF indexes the proposal that this text is available for multiple readings. So Sleepstone's reflective moments may also be examined for evidence of ironic parody, not only of therapy and hypnosis, but also of this author's own thesis on trance talk and hypnosis from a perspective of 'radical reflexivity.' Furthermore the interview with Sleepstone, as an example of celebrating the monster in reflexivity, illustrates the way that reflexivity can be used for therapeutic

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17 I do not intend to criticize the use of unconventional forms, but to reflect upon them in order to see if, how and when they can be effective. The unconventional reflexivity of an ALF bites when it can say something that a conventional text is not equipped to say, through its restrictive form. Of course, what counts as effectiveness and biting is more grist for the textual mill.
interventions, and vice versa. Thus, reflexivity is both therapeutic and therapy, therapy is both reflexive and reflexivity, poetic reflexivity is hypnotic and therapeutic, hypnotic trance is reflexive, therapeutic and poetic, and so on...

In the next chapter I shall examine the use of poetry within social science texts, both as a form of subjective research, and as an ALF, in order to explore to what extent poetry can convey knowledge and experience to the reader in a way not readily communicated by the ‘standard’ text. This notion of poetry as a vehicle for a deeper understanding of the world will be explored both as a romantic truth and as a social construction. But first, or finally, the poet speaks both to the reader and for herself.

* 

Who takes to this track,
As though each word were mapped
Upon a stony path,
And a story
Is a journey,
An exodus,
A flight into science —
A sign of your existence.

Who sees the image
As though a mirror held beneath the world
Reflects the drift
Of things that stir —
Only sleeping.

The sound will keep.

The air lifts bright,
The sweep of wings is light
And feathers blurred.

What else
In flight
Will you remember?

(Scribbler. Resident poet. Now speaking.)

* 

Reflexion\textsuperscript{18} on chapter one

Hang on a minute, what you are implying? That if I, or anyone else, just follow your pre-defined ‘steps’ then I/they can write a reflexive thesis?

Who are you?

I’m the reflexive next turn. Who are you?

The reflexive next turn.

Oh, okay. Well, surely this isn’t what Ashmore intended when he wrote \textit{The Reflexive Thesis} — that you could do reflexivity by following a process of mechanical steps of the kind that you imply in your DIY manual? The radical ‘bite’ of Ashmore’s thesis is that it brilliantly and originally creates a new form of thesis wrighting, excuse me, writing, within social science, using reflexivity to both illustrate and problematize the construction of knowledge. What you seem to be doing is turning it into a positivist method, a token reflexivity, while alerting the reader to the possible dangers of token reflexivity.

I see you’ve taken the DIY guide rather literally. You see, it is not intended to be read as a manual, but as a parody, a spoof manual illustrating reflexivity at work. That is — the real way to write a reflexive thesis is not to do as I say, but to do as I do

\textsuperscript{18} Yet another turn. MacMillan’s last word, and Scribbler’s last word have now been pre-empted by the presence of this reflexion. See also Woolgar (1988), for an example of how this neat device enables the editor to have the last word on the work of all the book’s various contributors.
(as I did as Ashmore did). The careful reader will note that what I have shown is a creative process which, of course, cannot be made into a set of mechanistic steps. After all, as any Wittgensteinian knows (and aren’t we all Wittgensteinians, in our various ways?) rules don’t specify their own applications, and cannot tell you exactly what to do (Wittgenstein, 1953). I mean, you can’t have a set of rules on how to be creative in writing, for example, poetry, hypnotic trance inductions, Ph.D. theses (reflexive or not)...

Did you say the real way to do reflexive work..?

Naturally. The real nature of reflexive work is creative, not mechanistic.

This isn’t fair! You set up this easy user’s guide, as DIY steps to writing a reflexive thesis, you use it, and now, in this turn, you take it away. Aren’t you trying to have your cake and eat it?

Well, having my cake and eating it is as good a definition of reflexivity as you can get.

Isn’t this what everyone wants, but has repressed? Being told that you cannot have your cake and also eat it, is obviously the logical reasoning of the ego controlling the desires of the id.

Who said that?

The reflexive next turn. The voice of the ego reasons that of course you can’t have your cake and eat it. Logically it can’t work that way. Furthermore, the control of the superego ensures that such primary instincts remain repressed (and the more you want it, the deeper the repression). In contrast, and liberating us from these silly bourgeois modernist hang-ups, reflexivity is both the therapy of liberating previously repressed creative desires, and the celebratory instantiation of having one’s cake and eating it.

What’s this? How did all these crumbs get on my carpet?

Who wants another slice?

All of us, naturally.

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42
CHAPTER TWO

POETRY AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM: Wrestling Laurels of Poetic Acclaim

Research as a play

The ALF of this chapter is, to put it prosaically, a play, which parodies a meeting between the student-as-poet and the supervisor-as-sociologist. This takes the form of extracts from play scripts and performs 'analysis' by making explicit the ways that differing versions of the world are rhetorically supported. According to Michael Mulkay (1985, 1991), all analysis is a form of parody, using an apparently 'original' source and developing it in order to show its failure to clarify (ironically establishing the primacy of the secondary text by electing to speak for the other — that which it has silenced). The following analysis is not only a form of parody, in the way that it turns the referenced sources into unwitting 'players' who speak to my directions, but also a parody of analysis, in the way that it tells the tale of versions — the romantic and constructionist perspectives in conflict. My own position as researcher would appear to be impartial (see Bloor, 1976), as a narrator of tales who offers a symmetrical and balanced view of the construction of analysis, using examples of both the poet's and the sociologist's positions to exemplify this stance. Until, that is, with a turn upon the reflexive spiral, the impartial voice within the text is itself shown to be a parody, an example of the rhetoric of interpretation.

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THE POET'S DECONSTRUCTION: A TRAGEDY.

Act I: In which the poet introduces herself

It's a bright spring morning. The sociologist, Dr. Ashmole, is sitting in his office in the social sciences department of Loughborough University winding down after giving a lecture on social constructionism. He twirls a piece of string around his pencil while idly musing that inviting students to consider multiple readings from a single text might be sardonically renamed 'shooting oneself in the foot' when it comes to marking their exam scripts. On his desk,
in draft form, is chapter one of Katie MacMillan’s thesis, which ends its discussion on do-it-yourself reflexivity with a poem. There seems no adequate explanation for the presence of the poem, and Dr. Ashmole, now glancing at it, wonders why the poem has been placed there, and what it has to contribute to the rest of the chapter. Katie MacMillan, his Ph.D. student, is now six minutes late for their meeting. There is a knock on the door.

Dr. Ashmole: Come in.

A woman enters clutching a cardboard folder. She introduces herself as Evangeline Scribbler, the resident poet within Katie MacMillan’s thesis, drops her folder scattering papers on the floor, apologizes for the diversion, her presence, and MacMillan’s absence.

Evangeline Scribbler: She asked me to come and see if you had any feedback, or any questions, on the poem I wrote for chapter one.

Ashmole: You wrote the poem? I thought it was one of Katie’s ALFs. Okay, well maybe you can tell me what its place is in the chapter.

Scribbler: Oh. Oh, yes. Katie said you might ask that. She said to give you this.

Scribbler hands Ashmole a piece of paper. On it is written

‘Chapter 2.
PS The poem is a precursor to the discussion you are now having.’

Scribbler: But it also invites the reader to reflect on the work within the text from a poetic perspective. The poet’s version is after all the one traditionally inspired by the gods — so it is probably, if you will forgive me, the best one of all.

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A desperate deep poet’s truth

Writing is a going to the realm of the dead, but we’re not always aware of it. Why is it that we mainly speak about the dead? Because writing is violent. Writing is supposed (I think so at least) to try and say the truth — it’s a desperate deep poet’s truth.

(Cixous, 1990:19)

Poet seeks poetess/muse for

words, wit, walks, wine &
wooing, 28-35. S Yorks...

(‘Soulmates’ ad. The Observer, Sunday 19th November 1995)

Both Hélène Cixous (1990), and the lonely hearts poet from South Yorks offer us a fairly traditional image of the poet awaiting the company of the muse. This goddess (Flores, 1991), the source of the artist’s inspiration, speaks to the poet from the underworld of the unconscious and it is from here that a deeper, prophetic truth surfaces. Cixous’ is a romantic reflection of the poet dedicated to truth\(^1\), whose revolutionary voice has been marginalized. Yet still, the writer’s ability to transform the mundane with her dreaming vision cuts into the heart of us all (ibid: 25) and offers us a new and profoundly better way to view the world.

Robert Endleman (1967), in declaring the outstanding qualities required for creativity, suggests a Freudian model of artistic personality, and describes the ability of the ‘true artist’ (ibid: 386) to move between the creative drive of the unconscious and the creative ‘mastery’ of the conscious in a manner never attained by more ordinary people, who are either too rigorously repressed to be able

\(^1\) Richard Brown (1977:87) states that, according to Nietzsche (1960), the poet deliberately deceives by using a self-conscious metaphoric language to create new perceptions and frames of meaning, and in doing so is ‘a liar in the service of truth’.
to tap the unconscious forces within themselves, or
too impulsively open to the unconscious forces to be
able to give them any coherent order

(ibid)

The implication that the poet is extraordinary in her ability to make sense and order from
chaos through her visionary work (Eliot, 1960; Tyler, 1986), and to make a ‘leap’ from
an ordinary frame of reference to another, more radically innovative one (Brown,
1977:87; Neitzsche, 1960:315), is a familiar image echoed in a variety of academic,
philosophical and literary spheres. From this perspective it is taken for granted that
poetic writing is able to offer perceptions of the world that go beyond the limitations of
‘clinical positivism’ (Brady, 1991:6). The ‘interpretative soaring’ that can be achieved
through poetic work may ‘defeat intellectual autism’ (ibid) and offer a richly informative
perspective as the researcher reflects upon her own subjective experience and her
connection with the object of her study.

Within, for example, anthropological writing there is a growing body of work2
which uses poetry both to extend the limits of anthropological description, and to reflect
the textual construction of knowledge (Brady, 1991). Stephen Tyler (1986), in arguing
the inadequacies of science, states that science may communicate its ideas readily but
has little of worth to say (ibid:124). In contrast, post-modern ethnography, as a
‘cooperatively evolved text’ offers much more for the reader. It offers him therapy.
According to Tyler, a poetic ethnography creates the opportunity for reader and writer
to participate in a ‘therapeutic’ (ibid: 125) integration of poetry and ritual performance.
In reviving a sense of communal ethics, the ethnographic poet

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2 Anthropology’s link with the poetic includes the work of Edward Sapir and Ruth Benedict,
whose poetry was published in media other than anthropological texts (Brady, 1991).
Ethnopoetry, developed from writings in the early 1970’s by such writers as Jerome
Rothenberg (1981; 1985), and Gary Snyder (1974), is now, according to Ivan Brady (1991)
well established. Clifford Geertz’s ‘interpretative’ anthropology (e.g., 1988), which suggests
the need to draw on both the researcher’s experiential construction of native life, and general
scientific accounts, offers further foundational arguments in favour of the subjective and poetic.
The Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly has annual poetry and fiction competitions, and
anthropology symposiums have hosted poetry readings, beginning with the first one in 1983,
organized by Stanley Diamond.
evokes a fantasy whole abducted from fragments, and then returns participants to the world of common sense — transformed, renewed, and sacralized.

(ibid: 126)

Tyler emphasizes the dialogical constitution of the story, which involves the poet and the reader. Poetry may lead us to the land of the unconscious — 'a strange land with occult practices' (ibid), where the poet has sought her inspiration, but the reader also returns transformed. Tyler links the power of the poem with the mystery and healing of the occult (see also Endleman, 1967; Jaynes, 1976; Wagner, 1991), describing it not only as a journey but a sacred transformation. The reader, as a participant in the poem, is transported by the conjured dreams of the poet, and therapeutically altered by the experience.

From this textual description of poetry as therapeutic (Tyler’s and my own), it is a small step into the hypnotist’s trance. Both the poem and the hypnotic trance induction lead us to the strange realms of the unconscious and invite change. The poem therefore from this perspective can be read as hypnotic, trance inducing and transforming.

POETRY. As a hypnotic device, particularly when read or performed by a skilled speaker, poetry excels. Using archetypal imagery, steady, flowing rhythms and sonorous tones, subjects respond with states of emotional or mental arousal. There is believed to be a healing quality in some types of poetry for some listeners or readers.

(Evangelista, 1991: 175)

Peter Brown (1991), examines the links between poetry and hypnosis from a biological, social and evolutionary perspective (see chapters three & five of this thesis for further analysis of Brown’s text), proposing that the poet in traditional oral cultures was expected
to provide tales that would guide both the individual and the
group in any endeavour. To do this, their performance had to
be entrancing — deeply relevant and totally memorable
(\textit{ibid}: 68).

The poet had the responsibility of preparing his audience, emotionally and
mentally, for whatever task or journey lay ahead of them. He thus had to be a visionary\textsuperscript{3} who would tell his story in a hypnotic and memorable way, with his therapeutic/stirring
message guiding the listener wherever he went (see \textquote{My voice will go with you’}, chapter
seven of this thesis).

Following on from Evangeline Scribbler\textquotesingle s rather grand statement that the poet\textapos;s
version of the world is the best one of all (and her voice has gone with us), I have
attempted to outline the basis for such an argument. From this perspective, the \textquote{deep
truth} of the poem lies in its ability to reflect the poet\textapos;s vision of other worlds, her
journey to the unconscious, flight to the summit of Parnassus, sojourn at the feet of the
muse.\textsuperscript{4} The poet is a prophet whose art conveys a level of understanding to which more
ordinary (see Endleman, 1967, above) folk cannot unaided gain access. It is a truth
beyond the mundane that the poet lays bare. What chance, then, for the reader \textit{qua}
sociologist, fresh from a sociology lecture and musing on examination scripts, of
grasping this deeper and more profoundly true understanding of the world (and the
poet\textapos;s poem at the end of chapter one)? The sociologist, in questioning the presence of
the poem in a social science thesis, is, if I may make this apparently unreflexive
interpretation, speaking for sociology in general with his implication that the poem is a
curiosity. What may a social scientist do when confronted with a poem? There are two

\textsuperscript{3} This description of the poet as a visionary is not particular to Western culture. Julian Jaynes
(1976), in his history of the development of consciousness, suggests that early humans, across
culture, heard and acted upon the voices of the gods, which was communicated as a kind of
inner poetry. Jaynes sees this as a universal and biological part of human preconsciousness
(see also Brown, 1991). Ancient Arabic culture named the poet \textquote{sha\textquoteright ir} or \textquote{the knower}
(Jaynes: 363). Nowadays \textquote{great poetry} (\textit{ibid}: 361), as written from the creative side of a
bicameral mind, still retains this inspiration from the divine. (See also Martin Wolf [1974] for
a description of Kahlil Gibran, the \textquote{Prophet of Lebanon} [1883-1931], and how he was
recognized for the \textquote{ancient wisdom and mysticism} (\textit{ibid}: v) of his poetry).

\textsuperscript{4} Like Tyler (1986) and Cixous (1990), (see also Defromont, 1990) — and exaggerated to
parody-like effect in the South Yorks poet\textapos;s lonely hearts ad — so my own prose also reflects
the poetics of writing about poetry. This is both rhetorical (a display of poetics reveals me as an insider) and infectiously good fun.
standard moves which might be made at this point. First, it could be sent to the English literature department, where it seems to belong, and subjected to a literary analysis. Or second, it can be subjected to a sociological analysis, to explain its presence as part of a social process — in this way sociology can be seen to be doing its rightful job. As we shall see, in Act II, it is the latter of these traditional options that the sociologist chooses in electing to ‘deconstruct’ the writer of the poem.

**Note: On being (reflexively) non-reflexive**

In summarizing the story behind the deep poet’s truth, as if there were only one truly truthful version, I have refrained from a textual analysis of the work of my supporting cast. The purpose of *A Desperate Deep Poet’s Truth*, with its characters each telling a tale of the poet’s gift for prophecy and truth, is to illustrate a background understanding to Scribbler’s description. Likewise, in the text below, *Discovering The Socially Constructed Nature Of Art*, different voices tell another tale — of art without the mystery, a social process like any other. However, at any point in reading the versions of poetry, the brief user’s guide to reflexivity from the previous chapter may come in useful, as you, the reader participant, with your (now issued) invitation to test out the textual deconstruction tool for yourself, subject the text to rhetorical analysis. This, of course, includes an analysis of my own, presented-as-impartial narration.⁵

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**Act II: In which the sociologist wrests the laurels from the poet and crowns sociology.**

**Ashmole:** - No. What I’m talking about is the *construction* of a poetic identity. You can see the appeal, for a romantic to describe herself as a bit of a visionary.⁵
someone who should be listened to (even if she isn't), someone who has some gift that sets her apart from the rest of us. As though, one could believe, she had been selected by the gods, and is therefore different and special. Someone, in fact, whose version of the world is the best one of all, simply because she is a poet.

Scribbler:  (protesting) But I don't think I construct myself as a poet, I just am. I've always written poetry, ever since I was ...

Ashmole:  (interrupting excitedly) My point exactly! This is part of the enduring rhetoric of the Real poet. One of the things that makes her identity all the more poetic sounding. She didn't choose to be a poet, she didn't wake up in the morning and say 'I know, I'll be a poet' and set about working out how to write the stuff. She was born that way! Now, what social constructionism would say is that it is the social understanding of what it takes to be a poet that makes up the poetic identity, rather than poetic writing being a feature of some unique talent. Have you read Howard Becker's 'Art Worlds'? I think I've got it here somewhere.

The poet shakes her head and watches as the sociologist drums his index finger along the rows of paperbacks on his bookshelves. She has an unpleasant sensation that could well portend the initial stages of psychic fragmentation. At the moment, however, she thinks she has a headache.

Scribbler:  The room's a bit stuffy. Can I open the window?

Ashmole:  Go ahead. Sorry, I can't find it, but the basic idea is that art and artists aren't any more unique than any other work or worker. Art, in fact, is just a job like any other. 'Genius' from this perspective is in the same ball park as socially defined. Without the social recognition of the kinds of things that make a creative work extraordinary there can't be such a thing as genius.

Scribbler:  But I don't write on the basis that I am extraordinary. I mean, I don't have anything to gain by being a poet. There's no financial gain. I don't publish my
poems — or at least not very often. It’s not a job, I just write them and then pretty much leave them be.

Ashmole: - Yeah, but don’t you see that being an unpublished poet emphasizes your uniqueness. You are so different, so truly a poet set apart from others, even from published poets, that you don’t even try to be understood. You have positioned yourself as a poet above poets, someone who is in contact with the gods rather than ordinary mortals...

A violent crash is heard as though coming from outside. The poet and the sociologist go over to the window and peer out. In the car park below everything appears to be much the same as normal. No students are screaming with fright, but wander casually in shoals, towards the building. No lecturers dash downstairs to check that their cars/pushbikes are still intact. They remain indoors discussing departmental policies and the malicious personality of the photocopying machine. No birds flock at a safe height. No one cries.

Ashmole: - I can’t see anything, can you?

Scribbler: - It sounded like some scaffolding falling down somewhere out of sight. Do you really think that it’s a good idea to go around demystifying the mysterious, by claiming all processes are social constructions?

Ashmole: - Yes I do. What’s wrong with seeing that a claim of mysteriousness is a socially constructed claim rather than immovable reality? Take your presentation of yourself as a poet....

Scribbler: - (whimpering soundlessly) But do I present myself as a poet though? I thought I was just me, Evangeline Scribbler, who happened to also be a poet. I don’t particularly seek social recognition for writing poetry, and I certainly don’t long to be discovered.

Ashmole: - Ah, this ‘just happened’ is a nice piece of rhetoric. Of course you don’t want to be discovered! The very best kind of genius is someone who is ahead
of his time, undiscovered and misunderstood within his own life span, because the world was not ready for his visionary work. I mean, you’re not a real genius’s genius, a real authentic genius, unless there’s a lack of social recognition. Let’s have a look at the criteria for being a genius’s genius? - You need to die young, be crazy or controversial...

Scribbler lets the rest of the sociologist’s talk drift past her. Her own voice has fallen, it seems, with all the other pieces of her known identity, onto the floor, lying as imaginary debris. She shifts her leg and her foot drops off. Blinks and her eye is dislodged from its socket. This image of a dismembered poet strikes her forcefully and poignantly. Has the artist been successfully dethroned? Will she now find her proper place in the socially constructed world, having been presented, at last, with an even deeper truth than the previous one. The sociologist’s truth cuts chasms. Scribbler takes her leave thoughtfully, wandering from the room as though in a trance.

Discovering the socially constructed nature of art

Once upon a time it was legitimate to study the arts in society as if the arts were a known quantity. Today this is no longer intellectually viable. Scholars have discovered the socially constructed nature of art, cultural institutions, artists, and publics.

( Zolberg 1990: ix)

Unlike the romantic, for whom art is and should remain a mystery (Donogue, 1983; see also Gergen, 1991, for a discussion on the romantic vision of self ), the social constructionist argues that there is no mystique surrounding art, no essential quality of inspired genius that can be separated out from the social context in which the work has arisen. The work of art is set aside (as [pre-SSK] sociology of science set aside scientific
knowledge), while the sociologist examines the artist and the conditions of production. Vera Zolberg (1990), for example, takes art as a setting for sociological study, in which attention is focused, not upon the aesthetic concerns of art, but the social environment and the institutional structures which shape its development as art (ibid: 55-56). The mystical trappings of art are part of its social definition, with the sociologist not so much drawing the trappings aside as treating them as objects of investigation in themselves.

Howard Becker (1982) deconstructs the mystique of art by tracing the involvement of other members of what he calls the ‘art world’ (which has within it subdivisions, little breakaway art worlds, including the work of ‘mavericks’ and ‘naive’ artists). Becker’s study, which shows art to be a social and collaborative process, includes an examination of status creation. Status arises, not from the genius of the artist, but from the collective activity of the art worlds (ibid: 360), with the value of the work constructed over a period of time, and adhering to social understandings of what good art is. Becker states that while ‘most theories of aesthetics and the more traditional versions of the sociology of art insist on the possibility and the necessity of making judgements of quality about art works’ (ibid: 365), a more useful way to examine art is to look at what is culturally constructed as valuable work and how this work has endured and built up a reputation over time. He cites, as an example, Raymonde Moulin’s (1967) proposal that the reputation of Old Masters has endured, not because people think that they are particularly good paintings, but because their historical importance does not change over time, while opinions and tastes in art do.

While social constructionist perspectives seemed to be used in a variety of ways (see for example Spanos’s social constructionism as discussed in chapter five), sometimes contradicting other versions residing under the same name (Potter, 1996), broadly, constructionism would aim to show the ways in which the world is defined and built through social processes. From this perspective what is said about poets and poetry, as anything else in the social world, is a topic for ‘deconstruction,’ which in this context is a sociological analysis which reveals the ways that the poet’s notion of her inherent poetic qualities are culturally (or discursively) established. For example, according to Zolberg (1990), although there are myths surrounding the artist which may have made analysis difficult for the sociologist, such myths are no longer romantically mysterious once the social constructionist shows that they arise, not from some
objective truth about poets, but from within the social world and shared understandings of what we take to be poetic qualities.

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The rhetoric of wrestling laurels

The tale of two perspectives (above), from the romance of poetry to the 'discovery' (Zolberg, 1991: ix) of art as a social construction, is not quite as it may seem. This is neither an impartial discussion, nor a linear progression from fiction to fact, myth to reality. While the extract from a discussion with the sociologist and poet may illustrate a strength of social constructionism, in its empirical approach to social processes in operation rather than as a piece of abstract theorizing, it has also been summoned in order to show the limitations within such a perspective, and to strengthen my own argument for a reflexive form of social constructionism (see also chapter five).

Reflexive social constructionism enables us to reflect upon Becker's analysis of the 'art world' as a study constituted within the 'sociology world.' In this way we can make sense of the sociologist's version of poetry as the kind of thing that a sociologist would do. Furthermore, by reflexively examining the construction of my own text, I am able to question the extent to which poetry, as an ALF, can be used as a form of analysis (the 'reflexive world' remains a fairly small, but perfectly formed, coterie of scholars ahead of our time). Whereas using poetry as a topic for analysis maintains and reinforces the boundaries of standard sociology, poetry as analysis (and in the case of Scribbler's second poem below, poetry as parody as analysis) can be used in order to illustrate the proposed limitations of traditional social science research. Unlike anthropological poetics, in which poetry is used by the anthropologist in order to say something about his experience that cannot be said as effectively in any other way (Brady, 1991), the social constructionist perspective as discussed above, in treating the poem as a topic for analysis, continues to do standard sociology (just as the literary analyst, in examining how the poem works as a piece of literature, constitutes both the poem as literary object, and also literary analysis as appropriate to it).
The sociologist in Acts I & II fails to make use of the potential of social constructionism by applying it unreflexively to the construction of a poet, while ignoring the implications that this has raised for his own position as a sociologist. For example Ashmole’s ‘deconstruction’ of the poet’s rhetoric (pages 7-9) implies a ‘well, you would say that wouldn’t you’ position, which inevitably leaves the sociologist open to the same accusation. Of course he would say that poetry is part of a social process — isn’t that, after all, what a sociologist, supervisor, expert on social constructionism, fresh from a lecture on the topic, would say?

By introducing a spiralling reflexivity to the text, so that we may return to that which has been proposed, we can reintroduce the presence of the first poem (chapter one), this time as an ALF, and thus begin to review the sociologist’s reaction with a little more surprise. In questioning the presence of the poem in the research student’s thesis Ashmole (unwittingly?) questions the basic legitimacy of ALFs in social science texts. The sociologist’s deconstruction turns poetry into a topic for (rather than an example of) sociology and the poet into sociology’s object. It subsumes poetics into what sociology already is (or was), guarding the boundaries by retaining a steadfastly sociological perspective. Ashmole (speaking from the sociology world), treats the poem in the same way that Becker treats art, from a traditional, one sided sociological perspective, in which the poem is an object under investigation, with anything that does not fit into sociology’s explanation (such as the romantic mystery of the poem’s truth) becoming a candidate object of it. As suggested in chapter one, alternative literary forms have been used in social science texts in order to highlight the construction of knowledge, and to deconstruct the assumptions that lie behind the use of standard forms of writing within more traditional research and texts. By using poetry we can begin to see where social constructionism ‘bites’ — here, at the point where reflexivity transforms social constructionism from standard sociology into a research method which proposes to extend the boundaries of analysis, both its methods and its objects.

Richard Brown (1977) suggests, in A Poetic for Sociology, that social theory would benefit from a method which incorporates the reflexive, intuitive qualities within poetry, with the objectivity of science, since, according to Brown, both the artist and the

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6 For an examination of the rhetoric of saying ‘they would say that wouldn’t they?’ see Edwards and Potter (1992: 117-8).
scientist are involved in the same kind of activity — forging ‘new frames of vision’ (ibid: 34). If we treat the poem as another way of doing social science analysis, rather than as a topic for analysis, there is immediately available another, and less traditional perspective. In the following analysis the reach of this other ‘vision’ will be explored to see if and when poetry works as sociology in a way that standard texts cannot.

So now there are three options (it was two earlier) for Ashmole the sociologist when confronted with Scribbler’s poem at the end of chapter one of MacMillan’s thesis. First, he could recommend that it be consigned to the English literature department (at least metaphorically), where such forms belong, and where the appropriate analytic criteria properly reside. Second, it can be used as an object for analysis by the social science student in order to show how social constructionism explains poetry in terms of social processes. A third and less dismissive option, however, is to accept the poem as an ALF, and to see to what extent we can do sociology within poetry, in a similar way to the anthropologist who uses poetry as a way of extending the scope of anthropological texts. One of the problems of doing sociology with poetry, however, is in being able to say something in poetry in a way that makes a difference. This must require, without translation back into prose, an understanding of the research topic that is better than, or additional to, standard academic writing.

Experimental representations

As a way of experimenting with literary forms, social scientists, in investigating the relation between self and research subject, have presented their analysis in the form of poetry (Richardson, 1992, 1994; Paget, 1983, 1990a; Patai, 1988), or drama (Paget, 1988, 1990b). Laurel Richardson, in Writing: A Method of Inquiry discusses the limitations of ‘supposedly exemplary qualitative studies’ (1994: 516) in social science writing, proposing that academic texts need not be as ‘boring’ (ibid: 517) as they frequently turn out to be. Richardson suggests that by experimenting with different

7 I am making a distinction here between the ALFs of SSK (see chapter one), in which alternative forms are reflexively used as a way of displaying the author’s claims as shaped by her text, and subjective analysis which, although it seems initially to be making similar claims, places stronger emphasis on the way that the ‘self’ is featured within the author’s analysis, and less on the author’s own construction of textual claims.

8 There is an awful temptation to use make use of puns here and suggest that in wrestling the laurel of poetic acclaim this text is also wrestling with Laurel for poetic acclaim. But I won’t.
forms of writing the author can become more involved in her text and that this will lead to a greater understanding of herself in connection with her research topic — ‘[t]he deepened understanding of a self deepens the text’ (ibid: 524). This empathic and subjective text is, according to Richardson, more readable, inviting the reader to ‘relive’ (ibid: 521) the events emotionally with the writer.

Richardson’s own work, which involves ‘writing sociology as poetry’ (1992:126), evolved out of a dissatisfaction with the limitations of academic prose. According to Richardson, traditional academic research objectifies the research subject and places it ‘in a lineage’ (ibid: 125), with a focus on the topic, but not on the process of research and the involvement of ‘self’ (ibid: 125). For Richardson, experimenting with textual forms allows the researcher to not only gain a greater empathy with her subject’s concerns in relation to herself, but also to invite open, multiple readings. Laurel’s own ‘experimental representation’ was fashioned by turning 36 pages of transcribed data (an interview with Louisa May)9 into a 3 page poem, ‘using only (Louisa May’s) words, her tone, and her diction but relying on poetic devices such as repetition, off-rhyme, meter, and pauses to convey her narrative’ (ibid: 126). By using such ‘poetic devices’ Laurel was able, in her words, to turn Louisa May’s ‘bland and unconcretized’ speech which was ‘almost entirely devoid of images, metaphors, and poetic language’ (ibid: 132) into ‘poetry.’ The following extract from Richardson’s poem is made up entirely of her subject’s words.

I told him,
“I would never marry you.
I would never marry you.
I would never.

Just go away!”

But he wouldn’t. He painted the nursery.
He slept on the floor. He went to therapy.

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9 Although she uses conventional referencing for her academic sources, Laurel does not allow her subject, Louisa May, the source of her research material for The Consequences of Poetic Representation (1992), a surname.
We went to LaMaze.

*(We ceased having a sexual relationship directly after I had gotten pregnant and that has never again entered the situation.)*

*(ibid:129)*

Richardson’s poetry has had a varied response. Poetry audiences, identifying with Louisa May, have become tearful, oral historians have declared the superiority of the poem over prose, in capturing an ‘essence’ *(ibid: 132)* of the situation, feminists have praised the way that the poem speaks for women, in a way that standard patriarchal research texts negate. On the other hand, however, social scientists have questioned the extent to which Richardson has altered her subject’s talk, while Richardson’s post-modern literary reading group asked her about the validity of the poem as poetry. ¹⁰

In examining Richardson’s proposal that the poem tells us something sociologically that standard sociological prose cannot, as we can see (above), there have been a variety of responses, ranging from empathic involvement to suspicion that this might be neither real data nor a real poem after all. My own response is to suggest that, by collecting a wide range of audience responses (including, now, this one), Richardson achieves a way of highlighting interpretation as relative, not only to the writer/speaker, but also the reader/audience. However, since a variety of responses can be achieved by offering any text to a variety of audiences, there are problems in justifying Richardson’s poetic shaping of her subject’s talk. Although her claim is as a ‘sociological revolutionist’, problematizing sociology’s standard conceptions and methods of analysis *(ibid: 136)*, Richardson’s argument for her poem retains the tradition of social science research by being discussed unreflexively in prose.

Laurel, in rewriting (and inevitably corrupting) her subject’s talk as poetry, ironically treats Louisa May’s talk as limited, as though she is not able to speak for herself without the sociologist’s intervention (see MacMillan, 1995). From this perspective, the argument is not that Louisa May’s talk is intrinsically poetic, and merely requires bringing to the surface, but that if *this* (challenging) data can be made poetic,

¹⁰ Richardson deals with these criticisms as though with hurt surprise — ‘I experience deeply the hold of positivism on even those I consider my allies, my intellectual companions’ *(1992: 135).*
then the sociologist has successfully incorporated a ‘new’ research method into the sociology world.

Of all the available interviews, I chose to work on Louisa May’s not because she was intrinsically more interesting than other women I interviewed but because the literary and sociological challenges were great. If I could “do” Louisa May, I felt, I was onto a “do-able” method.

(Richardson, 1994: 132)

or rather — using Richardson’s methods, and relying on poetic devices such as repetition, off rhyme meter, and pauses in order to convey the story of her words in an empathic way —

Of all all all the interviews I chose Louisa May’s because

(ecause the challenges were great)

the sociological challenges

WERE GREAT!

I suggest that Richardson’s challenge for a poetic sociology fails to move the boundaries of the sociology world on several counts. First, the subject’s talk is manipulated in order to make Laurel’s argument, not Louisa May’s. The text is altered to such an extent that the sequence in which the words were spoken is unclear and unreliable, with certain phrases placed into parenthesis (as though Louisa May spoke this way), and certain words and phrases repeated. Richardson’s repetition may be used
for poetic effect, but does not portray the speaker's talk as interactionally meaningful.11 Second, Richardson berates sociology for its positivistic treatment of the subject, and describes standard sociological texts as frequently 'deadening' (ibid: 131), with their authorial statements, selective use of quotations and 'hoards' of references, dying metaphors, lack of concreteness (the latter two descriptions, in fact, surprisingly similar to her description of Louisa May's talk). However, Richardson objectifies her subject's talk, manipulating it into an a topic for sociology, with her academic discussion addressed to sociology, and written in prose (complete with authorial statements and obligatory references). Third, Richardson's argument is not poetic. By writing her supporting discussion in prose Richardson suggests the inadequacy of the poem to speak for sociology. Poetry is data, a topic for analysis, not sociology in itself. Furthermore, not only does the sociologist's poem say little or nothing that could not be said in prose (try, for example, reading the extract from Richardson's poem as prose), it offers less information about what Louisa May might have been saying (also through the exclusion of the interviewer from the interaction, despite Richardson's claims of subjective involvement with her subject's talk).

Richardson's unreflexive attempt to recapture what standard research deletes (see also Patai, 1988), ironically, involves a further manipulation of the transcript, and a kind of 'subjectivized' distance between the interviewee talking, and the poetic style of text. Despite her criticism that standard texts objectify the subject, Richardson also turns her subject's talk into an object (albeit a poetic one) for analysis in order to take her stand against traditional sociology.

I have suggested that using poetry within sociology, as a form of analysis rather than as a more traditional subject for analysis, can be problematical. Using Richardson's argument for the poem as an example of unreflexive research, I have now (as the reader, au fait with reflexivity, will be quick to point out) set myself up as answerable to produce an example of poetry that can be seen to be working, and to reflexively attend to my own analysis. I will do this by being slippery. Rather than offering a reflexively

11 Richardson's use of repetition is entirely artificial as an example of what Louisa May actually said, placing an emphasis that may not have been intended in the original interview. In doing so she ignores the subtle uses of repetition in ordinary talk (for example as a way of sustaining a topic, and encouraging empathy [cf. Rogers, 1961] or as a form of topic maintenance [Keenan et al, 1976] or 'repair' when it appears that the speaker was not heard or understood properly [see for example Schegloff, 1992; Schegloff & Sacks, 1977]).
‘successful’ example of a social scientist doing sociology with a poem, Evangeline Scribbler has requested a space in my thesis in order for her to do sociology with a poem. This way, I can argue, since it is a poem written by a poet, it shall speak for itself, and will not need substantial amounts of academic prose and references in order to justify its existence.\footnote{As if that’s not what I’ve been doing for the past 18+ pages of this chapter.} What the poem should not need is a prose explication — although since this thesis is an attempt to create a bridge between poetry and sociology, it still requires me to justify its existence here. The poem should also be able to speak for itself as sociology, or as analysis — although, of course, what counts as sociology or analysis is precisely at issue. One way to address this would indeed be to turn the poem into a prose interpretation (see suggested titles below, and also page 67), to explain it as successfully doing sociology! (If Scribbler is successful, will this make her a bona fide social scientist — in the same way that Richardson, in writing a poem, is a poet?) Here, not only should the poem speak for itself, but Scribbler too will speak for herself, responding to the sociologist’s ‘deconstruction’ by writing the next turn, the poetic deconstruction of the social constructionist. The poem in this instance is not part of a transcribed interview, it is a response to Scribbler’s encounter (see Act II, above) with the sociologist. It might be entitled A Cautionary Tale, or The Social Scientist, or The Return of the Wild and Free — among many other possible titles (with the title itself, as titles do, guiding the reader towards how the poem should be read). However, by being put in place both as an ALF and as a poem, there is also the double invitation (which by now should go without saying) for the reader to make her own title (see Stringer, 1985), and her own interpretation of the poem.
Once there was a spinner
Spun a spire,
A circle made of steel.
Above a fire
The place he made
Met like a fist
And no rain hissed
From desperate wastes.

Flakes
Would drift from ancient faces
Fossils,
Relics from the wilder spaces
When creatures navigating a storm
Were caught by the chimneys
But would not burn.

These races were
Too weak to call out and
Too tired to return.

Each bar in every cage is measured
The thing inside is left unseen.

Once a spinner spun a hollow
Split the rafters and shook the earth
The room collapsed
And gaping chasms
Took the fire back from its hearth

In the stillness,
Now, hereafter.
Bones exhumed
Or dragged from cairns,
Displayed in halls.
Suspended cruelly,
Once in cases by the stairs,
Hit the darkness,
Fully cracked
And like wild faces
Roar and run.

Turn to the tongue.
Turn to the traces.
Unravel the web.
Unspin what is spun.

(Scribbler. Resident poet. Now speaking.)

* 

Act III: In which social constructionism begins to look therapeutic.

Back in the sociologist's office some time later that year. The poet is clutching her folder and hovers near the open doorway, while the sociologist reads her poetic 'deconstruction'. The room is quiet, filled only by Scribbler's anxious breathing and the sound of paper moving in the slow summer breeze. After a while the sociologist clears his throat and speaks.

Ashmole:- It's interesting that you've responded in this way, I mean treating social constructionism as a criticism that works against poetry. I don't see it like that at all, but this is an interesting demonstration of, as you say, the effects of 'deconstruction', um, and the way that it could be taken as critical even when it doesn't intend to be. As I see it constructionism accounts for how things are in a different way without changing how things are. Except, hang on, he pauses in thought while absentmindedly rolling himself a cigarette of course
that's a bit naive, isn't it, because accounting for things in a different way is changing how things are.

Scribbler:- And if you hadn't deconstructed me as a poet, I wouldn't have gone away and written this poem as a retort, so I guess it has changed things for me.

Ashmole:- That suggests, doesn't it, that deconstructionism isn't destructive. In other words, by giving you this version of the poet's social role, your response was to go away and write something that was far more like poetry than anything you've ever written before.

Scribbler:- (protesting) Well I wouldn't go as far as to say that, but I suppose my response could be seen as a fairly positive one...

* 

The therapeutic resolve

Both the poet and the sociologist now hover in the doorway of the therapeutic change brought about by reflexive analysis. Armed with a reflection of the rhetorical construction of herself as a poet, writing what she calls poetry, she may now extend her repertoire by suggesting that her poem is a parody, not of other poems in general, but of ALFs. In this way she might not, despite the sociologist's declaration, be actually more poetic than before the sociological deconstruction, but she may have returned with a different voice — one that offers support for the poem as analysis within the social sciences. Scribbler's second poem, as a parody ALF, suggests that alternative forms avoid being taken seriously as art forms inviting literary criticism by being yet more bits of sociology. It is also a reminder that reflexivity can take yet another turn, and by examining the claims of the reflexive ALF — whose presence serves to remind the reader of the restrictions of standard forms — we can begin to suggest the restrictions of ALFs themselves, used by sociologists to do sociology within sociology.
Asking whether the poet’s poem enables her to do social science, is part of the same argument which suggests that the sociologist can do sociology with a poem. Yet although Scribbler’s poems are introduced as though they were able to speak for themselves, they are still unlikely to be taken seriously as sociology without a credible and prosaic argument to support their presence within this text. Conversely, the ALF poem does not need extensive literary analysis in order to support the sociologist’s declaration that it is poetry. As in Richardson’s example, the reader is expected to accept that the poem is a poem because she says so. Although the traditions of social science are clearly tested, the poem as an experimental representation, and the poem as an ALF are basically still sociological forms, and not yet alternative enough. In the same way Scribbler’s poem can only go beyond the scope of ALFs by taking the spiralling turns of reflexivity for granted. The poem as a reflexive construction, and as a deconstruction of the sociologist, and as a parody ALF, all need to be taken as read. In order to do this, however, the task of this thesis is to examine the work involved in getting the poem, or anything else for that matter, accepted as sociology, social psychology, social science, or whatever...

Becker’s study (1982) of ‘art worlds’ suggests that art is part of a social and collaborative process. The cultural ‘mystique’ of art and creative genius is examined and explained by the sociologist. Becker’s argument, however, can be applied to his own practice by showing that his descriptions are constituted within the ‘sociology world,’ as also is Ashmole’s reflexive constitution of himself as a proper sociologist, in showing the poet that poetry (and her understanding of herself as a poet) is socially constructed. What constitutes the ‘sociology world’ is generally ‘blackboxed’ (Latour & Woolgar 1986) as (unproblematical) sociological analysis. In attempting to incorporate poetry into the social sciences as something other than a topic for analysis, I am highlighting the construction of this ‘world,’ and the process of getting something to be counted as sociology. Here, before the poem gets blackboxed as a taken-for-granted ALF or, better still, as a poem which speaks for itself, and whose presence needs little introduction or explication, it jostles uneasily for a place in a social science text.¹³

¹³**The incorporation could occur if and when this thesis is judged an successful candidate for a Ph.D. in the social sciences department. But that’s a bit like a politician’s claim that they have a mandate, from a single electoral poll, for every part and parcel of their manifesto, including the warrant to alter it. Still, if they can do it, why not I?**
Having been accused of using an (albeit temporarily) unreflexive form of social constructionism, and by implication challenged to be more radically reflexive than he has ever been before, the sociologist is thus invited to read the poet’s parody poem as a poem. It seems at this point as if we have returned to a romantic version of poetry, in which the poet speaks an inspired truth, and offers a new frame of vision through which to read the social science research. This ‘truth’, however, is a reflexive one, and offers another turn, another go on the spiral, from another perspective. As discussed above, Ashmole offers a version of the poet from his position as a social constructionist, and thus, with comfortable authority, ‘deconstructs’ the poet in the same way that he is be able to deconstruct any social process. By informing the poet that this is how things are, poetry gets redefined as a sociological topic, with the truth being social constructionism. As the reflexive spiral turns again, the poet tells her story of how the constructionist builds a framework before our gaze, to show that frameworks are constantly being erected and dismantled, and spins a tale of how things are. In the ephemeral half-light of the poem the sociologist’s construction no longer appears as solid as the story that the teller of tales first told. And so it goes.

*
The therapeutic resolve of this tale is in how the turns of reflexivity highlight once more where the boundaries of a discipline might lie, and in doing so might also suggest a way to change. Within certain forms of therapy 'reframing'\textsuperscript{14} takes the client's disabling perspective and retells it in other, more therapeutic ways, and as a consequence offers alternative ways of seeing the world. Reflexivity reframes analysis in such a way as to suggest the researcher's own construction of knowledge, and in doing so extends the scope of the research. This in-depth exploration offers as a therapeutic result, a new self-actualized text, in which the social scientist has examined the reasons and habits of his past neurotic resistance to change, and is thus changed. The reflections of reflexivity, like the direction of hypnotic trance, like the deeper level of the poem, take us into and as a consequence, beyond, the confines of a textual self.

(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).

\* \*

\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, Bandler & Grinder (1982); Erickson (1980); Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch (1974).
CHAPTER THREE

HYPNOSIS AND POETRY: A Beguiling Connection

Versions of poetry

The previous chapter examines various versions of what poetry is, and how this is constituted by the speaker in his descriptions. By looking at the poetic voice of the sociologist, as she uses poetry to do sociology (e.g., Richardson, 1992), we see that the sociologist’s understanding of what poetry is (for example, ‘repetition, off-rhyme, meter, and pauses’ [ibid: 126]) is inextricably connected with the data that she offers as poetry. Furthermore, I have explored the implications that this kind of analysis (both Richardson’s and my own) has for expanding the scope of social science research. In order to make a difference — to say with ALFs what cannot be said with standard academic prose — I suggest that research should be reflexive rather than subjective, with reflexive research taking a turn at defining the boundaries of the discipline, the subject, and limitations of the text. In doing this the poem is transformed from data into a way of doing analysis. Poetry has been described as a form of communication which uses evocative metaphors to offer different levels of meaning (e.g., Brown, 1977). It is this notion of poetry which is used to analyze, within its reflexive parody, a social constructionist version of the poet, and to test the extent to which social science research can use poetry as analysis without turning it back into prose.

The next turn, this chapter, is shaped by letters addressed to Scribbler, the poet, from MacMillan, the hypnotist, in which MacMillan, in response to a request from a client, searches for a poetic trance induction. The letters, as an ALF, are reflexively analytical, parodying the creation of a trance inducing poem as a process, in which assumptions are made about the poetic qualities of hypnotic inductions or the trance inducing effects of a poem. Here, what both poetry and hypnosis are takes up from the previous chapter at the point where Stephen Tyler (1986) describes poetry as a therapeutic journey into the unconscious (see chapter two: 47-48). His description, quickly transformed with a sleight of keys into Evangelista’s (1991) proposal that poetry is a hypnotic device, form the connections between poetry and hypnosis that are the research topic of this text. Now, while the general topic of this thesis is an analysis of the ways in which hypnosis is described, and how hypnosis is thus rhetorically
constituted within the description itself, for the purposes of this chapter (as a link between poetry and hypnosis), hypnosis gets a definition. Edward Snyder (1930: 37) explains hypnosis as a state of consciousness 'in which the most striking characteristic is the subject’s increased susceptibility to suggestion' — achieved using ‘words which fix the subject’s attention by their rhythmic sound’ (*ibid*).¹

The story which follows is a tale of and reflexive research *into* the construction (or creation) of a trance inducing poem. It is offered both as a parallel with which to highlight and analyze the construction of poetry as trance inducing, spellweaving, and therapeutic, and an invitation to the reader to read the examples as if they were poems/as if they were trance inductions, and to try them out for himself.

* 

22nd September, 1993

Dear Katie,

I am usually at a loss when you ask me what imagery I would like you to cover in our trance work and I have been thinking about this since we last met.

I have wondered whether you could include some poetry some time. As I do not speak the ‘language,’ it would have to be of a straight-forward nature but I’m sure there must be lots of poetry of an ethereal nature, for instance, which would seem to me to be appropriate...

I hope you find this helpful.

Sincerely,

Ezra

* 

¹ No definition is simply a statement of the facts. Snyder (1930), as we shall see, argues for the hypnotic power of rhythm and imagery in poetry. Thus, in his definition of spellweaving poetry, a description of rhythm is an important one.
23rd Sept. 1993

Dear Evangeline,

Sorry about the panic-stricken phone call, although it wasn’t actually the middle of the night. But you’re right, I do need to write it down coherently — as you so dramatically pointed out, how are you supposed to know what I am asking you if I don’t know myself (it’s just that you could have said it a wee bit more diplomatically).

Well, as I said, I got a letter from Ezra Driftworthy with the first post this morning, asking if I could include some poetry in his next therapy session. He’s been coming to me for therapy, fairly regularly, for about six months, and we’ve used hypnotic regression (you know, ‘going back in time, drifting..drifting..’ stuff) to resolve some past issues. Now we’re using hypnosis to reframe everyday experience in a more positive light, focusing on the present and future. At the end of our last hypnosis session, when we were having one of our usual end-of-therapy chats, I suppose I got a bit carried away in talking about poetry and started repeating some of the things you told me about the power of the poem to transport the listener to mysterious, dreamy and therapeutic other worlds. And now, (okay so it’s not such a strange coincidence, but you must admit it is a terrific research opportunity for me!) Ezra wants to try some poetry in trance. This is great, but now I’m panicking. How do I find a poem that is both therapeutic and poetic? How would I recognize it as a poem as well as a trance induction? Have you got any ideas on this? Hope to hear from you soon,

Katie

The oral poet

The original Greek term for the oral poet is rhapsodizer..., from a root that means “to stitch together.” Oral poets stitched together words and sounds to create meaning. They were the living heritage of the culture, combining in one individual entertainer, physician, public library, and court of justice. The oral poet was expected to
provide tales that would guide both the individual and the group in any endeavour. To do this, their performance had to be "entrancing" — deeply relevant and totally memorable.

(Brown, 1990: 68)

Peter Brown (1990) links hypnosis with poetry by focusing on oral cultures, with social communication treated as central in the evolutionary development of the human brain. His work traces the development of the brain over several million years, from early pre-verbal communication, through oral cultures to modern hypnotherapy (see also chapter five), and concludes that trance is a natural part of our everyday lives. It is suggested that the human brain undergoes measurable rhythmic changes throughout a normal day, and that these are similar to the changes in brain rhythm which occur during hypnosis. These rhythmic changes have developed from times when humans relied on oral information and speakers to convey important messages effectively, with information being retained and affecting the listener in a way that Brown likens to trance. The speaker in oral cultures was required by the community to tell a story which was memorable and, as such, enchanting. ²

Oral skills thus survived, recognizable both in poetry and hypnosis, with poetry working as a form of hypnotic communication (see also Satow, 1923). The oral poet enchants her listeners with a tale which uses highly patterned rhythm and tempo. Words, spoken within the rhythm of breathing, and with particular intonation and emphasis, create a rapport which enables the speaker to guide the listener’s response to the poem’s metaphoric imagery. The stories told within oral cultures would resonate with the listener because they were old and familiar (for example, stories of heroic deeds), and yet

² William Edmonston (1986: 295) also examines links between poetry and hypnosis in his discussion on the historical development of hypnosis, describing ancient cultures who used incantations to induce sleep-like states. He makes a further connection between rhythm and ‘possession’ — ‘[t]he modern use of poetry in hypnosis is not the only thread of continuity between us today and the Druids of ancient times. The Druids used music as well in their rituals, and just as music was the major pathway to the Druidic ‘magical sleep,’ so too is the combination of music, rhythm, and dance fundamental to initiation, continuance, and termination of possession (often characterized by a ‘trance-like’ condition) by a loa (diety) [sic] in the modern Haitian practice of Vodun (Voodoo).’
would create conditions for change since they offered new understandings of the tales (ibid: 75-6).

Brown not only suggests that poetry is hypnotic, but also that hypnosis works in the same way as the oral poet’s poem (although whether trance inductions are necessarily poetic is a matter which shall be returned to later in this chapter).

Hypnotherapy... involves the extension of existing clusters of metaphor, the creation of new meaning.

(ibid: 243)

Brown cites the work of Milton Erickson (see chapter seven for further analysis of Erickson as the ‘legendary’ [heroic even] hypnotherapist), who used descriptive metaphors and language that reflected the patient’s own particular style of talking and preference for certain metaphors, to shape his therapeutic stories. In this way Erickson had the ability to blend ‘elements of music, poetry, and storytelling’ (ibid: 253) into therapy in such a way as to gain rapport and to facilitate the patient’s therapeutic learning and change.

The therapeutic metaphor

Erickson used therapeutic metaphors to communicate with his patients (and also his neophytes) on various levels (Haley, 1973; Hammond, 1984; Havens & Walters, 1989; Kirmayer, 1988), with the notion that it was perfectly reasonable to talk about one thing while conveying something quite different (Haley, 1993: 33).

In discussing the way that Erickson used stories, Jeffrey Zeig (1980), a proponent of Ericksonian hypnotherapy, suggests that anecdotes are an effective way to

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3 For example, Milton Erickson tells the story of Joe, a florist, who was dying of cancer, and was in extreme pain. Since narcotics gave Joe little relief, his relatives asked Milton if hypnosis could help. Milton went to see Joe in hospital and began to talk to him about growing flowers, and then tomatoes. “Now, as I talk, and I can do so comfortably, I wish you would listen to me comfortably as I talk about a tomato plant......Each day it grows and grows and grows, it’s so comfortable, Joe, to watch a plant grow and not see its growth, not feel it, but just know that all is getting better for that little tomato plant...” (Haley, 1973: 301). After Milton’s therapeutic suggestions which included comfort, not feeling [pain] and getting better, Joe was able to spend a brief and tranquil time at home with his family and plants. He was able to more easily control his pain, until he died.
enhance rapport between the therapist and patient, a way of offering further diagnostic information (which might involve noting at what points the patient would respond, for example, by nodding, within the story), and a creative and powerful form of treatment. The following list, abbreviated from Zeig’s description of the therapeutic effectiveness of Ericksonian-style anecdotes (Zeig, 1980: 7-15), suggests that within the treatment process itself anecdotes could be used

- to illustrate a point
- to suggest a solution, both indirectly and directly
- to get a patient to recognize himself in the story — for example, according to Erickson, if you want a person to talk about his brother, all you need to do is to tell a story about your own brother (ibid: 11)
- to increase motivation — Erickson would tell stories which would stimulate ideas within the patient
- to therapeutically control the relationship — ‘[a]necdotes can keep a patient “off balance,” so he/she cannot use habitual methods to control relationships’ (ibid: 12)
- to give embedded directives — which might involve placing a different emphasis on an important phrase
- to lower resistance — anecdotal messages, as indirect communication, can be confusingly complex, with the meaning not readily available for conscious understanding
- to reframe a problem

Story telling, from this perspective, is an effective form of therapy, in which the listener is drawn into the speaker’s tale, and through his own active interpretation of the story is able to create the conditions for his own change. The emphasis is upon the patient’s own abilities to make sense of the story in the most therapeutically suitable way (Erickson & Rossi, 1979).

The story, as therapy, has virtue made out of its highly specific purpose. It is no longer a mere story, it is a therapeutic technique, able to affect the listener in various

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4 Narratives are frequently treated as straightforward telling-it-the-way-it-is stories which can simply be told. For a discussion on narratives as discursive action, see Edwards (in press).
ways. The therapist, in telling her story, invites the patient's listening unconscious to interpret the tale in a therapeutic way, and — behold — when the story is told the therapy is done!

It would seem, for a moment only, hovering on the spiral of this tale (my own) of therapeutic tales, as if Ericksonian stories were ALFs in therapy, in which there are a multiplicity of possible meanings within any story, with the listener invited to make his own interpretational response. However, the difference is reflexive. From an SSK perspective the presence of the ALF signals the author's version as but another textual construction, while the Ericksonian therapist's perspective unreflexively offers her own version as the successful therapeutic approach (e.g., Haley, 1993; Zeig, 1980). Although in Ericksonian storytelling it is the patient's interpretation of the metaphors which makes the therapy work (Zeig, 1980), and not the therapist's story in itself, it is done under the assumption that there is a correct therapeutic response, and that the therapist helps the patient towards the therapeutic goal. Thus, there may be a variety of interpretations, but they must all be the same one (therapeutic), with the therapist guiding the patient to ensure that the right response (the 'proper psychological interpretation,' see below) is made.

Reliance was placed upon the patient's own thinking and intelligence to make the proper psychological interpretation of her symptom when she became ready for that realization.

(Erickson, 1980, Vol. IV, chap 2: 25)

From this perspective, while the patient may know best, the therapist knows even better (MacMillan, 1995), since she is already aware of the awareness that the patient needs to come to realize, and is the authority on when that realization has properly occurred. The story, in this context, is another device to do therapy with, and has the same practical purpose as the oral poet's poem — to persuasively convey the speaker's message (see also chapter seven), and to change the listener's frame of reference. Furthermore, the story about the story is another persuasion, this time that the author's version of Ericksonian storytelling as therapeutic is the authoritative one. Another spiral turn and we face the rhetoric of my own story (this one) of the persuasiveness of the author's (e.g., Erickson, 1980; Haley, 1973; Havens, 1985; Zeig, 1980) story of the
therapeutic story. This reflexive tale, in laying out the devices of textual persuasion (as though they were textual artefacts), uses the poet’s voice and the therapist’s metaphors to suggest the many versions of truth-telling, with this tale being another truth in the sight of many.

* 

24th Sept. 1993
Dear Evangeline,

Okay — how about this? The therapeutic story should illustrate the therapeutic point (as decided by the therapist), suggest the desired solution, increase the client’s motivation for change, give embedded suggestions which will serve to lower the listener’s ‘resistance’ by being indirect, reframe the problem, and, overall, give me therapeutic control of the session. I wonder how much of this I can find in a poem. The poem also needs to be close enough to the listener’s experience for him to be able to identify with it, and then, of course, since it is also a trance induction, I should be able to read it in a ‘hypnotic’ way. Actually, that bit should be fairly easy, since I am familiar with the ‘empathic’ techniques of trance induction. This means paying close attention not only to the pattern of my own breathing, but also to the client’s, and speaking in a harmony with my (generally slower) breathing rate and the client’s breathing rhythm. If I get it right the general idea is that I can, by example, suggest a slower, calmer breathing and pulse rate for the listener. By speaking slowly and placing emphasis on particular words-as-suggestions within the trance procedure....

After writing the above I got distracted and went to look at some of my research data (in which, as you know, both myself and the client are subjects), for an example of me performing a trance induction. From the transcribed trance sessions I picked out this little excerpt, to give you an idea of what I’m talking about.

.hh And sleep comes down as soft as night hhh (1.8)

.hh and sleep: (.) comes down as soft as night  hhh (1.8)
The suggestion makes fairly explicit links between trance and sleep, rather than indirect suggestion, but perhaps you can get an idea about the way that a hypnotist might place emphasis on key words, speaking in the rhythm of breathing

\[(breathe \text{ in} \ 'and sleep comes down' \text{ spoken breathing out} \]
\[breathe \text{ in} \ 'and sleep comes down as soft as night' \text{ spoken breathing out and pause}\]

while conducting trance induction and therapy.

This bit about sleep actually reminds me of the only example of a hypnotic poem that Peter Brown comes up with (it is interesting that he discusses the story of the hypnotic brain and our natural response to poetry without either giving more than this one example of a hypnotic poem, or getting hypnotically poetic himself). The extract he offers is from the scene, in Shakespeare's *Tempest*\(^5\), where Prospero seems to put Miranda into trance.

Prospero. — Here cease more questions:

Thou art inclin'd to sleep;
'tis a good dulness,
And give it way;
— I know thou canst not choose, — [MIRANDA sleeps.

But I am wondering if Shakespeare’s description is of someone going into trance, as Brown says, or whether the bard is describing Miranda as just so tired at the end of Prospero’s story that she really went to sleep, and so tired that she would have nodded off anyway, regardless of what suggestions Prospero might have made?\(^6\) Maybe Prospero was saying the Elizabethan equivalent of ‘You look dead whacked. Why not

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\(^5\)Brown (1992: 124) interprets Prospero’s conclusion to his story of the shipwreck and address to Miranda as a ‘hypnotic induction.’ This powerful play shows Shakespeare’s ‘mastery of language and verbal rhythm’ and also demonstrates the human ability to understand ‘the most complex and subtle of human truths,’ embedded in the language of metaphor (ibid). Brown’s description of the *Tempest* is used as supporting evidence that the brain as hypnotic. He does this by presenting Shakespeare as the oral poet relating a tale of deep truth to his audience. Shakespeare, the enchanter (and who could doubt the genius of Shakespeare?) tells a tale of Prospero, the enchanter, and of Miranda’s enchantment. Shakespeare’s audience is both inherently capable of knowing the truth in Shakespeare’s metaphorical tale (the truth of enchantment), and, of course, enchanted by the tale.
give in and have a kip?' This is the problem for me. Looking for hypnotic poems, makes everything I read readable as a trance induction (every phrase means 'sleep!') And in the same way, searching for a poetic induction makes everything people say sound like a poem (every meaning is deep).

Anyway, rather than reading Shakespeare to Ezra, and relying on Brown's assurance that this is an example of a hypnotic poem, I thought I could try a trance induction taken from Havens & Walters Hypnotherapy Scripts7 (under the title of 'General Purpose Metaphors,' and subtitled 'Erickson's Wisdom'). This way I could have the heroic figure type (Erickson) Peter Brown alludes to in his discussion of oral poetry,8 that the listener can both identify with, and be changed by (from the therapeutic effects of the wisdom metaphor). The extract I'm sending you is an example (below) of a therapeutic story embedded in a trance induction. But could it also be a poetic induction? And is it poetic enough? It seems to look like a poetic text, and it seems to rhyme in places.

And so, while you relax
I can wonder,
as I often do,
what that master hypnotherapist,
Milton Erickson,
would say to you, now.
Because he often had his clients relax,
and he spoke to them of many things
while they drifted into a deep trance
and became aware of other things
that otherwise would go overlooked,
or ignored,
or hidden from view.

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7 Havens & Walters's (1989: vii) 'neo-Ericksonian orientation' forms the basis for their 'straightforward instructions on how to do hypnotherapy,' in which the reader studies the prepared scripts, and then uses them, word for word or creatively embellished, as trance inductions. The scripts, although written by the authors of Hypnotherapy Scripts, claim to reflect Erickson's own use of metaphors and anecdotes as therapeutic tools.

Because he almost seemed

to see into their minds,

to see through them, into them,

where they kept hidden

their secret hopes, dreams and fears.

And he knew what to say,

what to do  .

Katie

*

25th Sept. 1995

Dear Evangeline,

The point you made on the phone this morning, about the hypnosis script I sent
you not being intended as a poem in the first place, is surely one of the central issues in
looking for the hypnotic poem (i.e., is it a hypnotic induction/poem because of the
author’s claim, or is it a poem/hypnotic induction because it fulfills other criteria, supplied
by the author, on what constitutes a poem/induction)? In the Tempest quotation what we
have isn’t Shakespeare’s declared intention that it should be read as a hypnotic tale, what
we’ve got is Brown’s description of it as such. This isn’t some unusual breach of
academic etiquette, interpreting work by attributing intention, it goes on all the time (like
the analysis/parody which claims to clarify the meaning of the original source  ). As I
said to you on the phone, I could, if necessary, devote the rest of my thesis to a
discussion on how Havens & Walters ‘script’ works as an example of a hypnotic poem
— although whether this argument would be plausible is a different matter.

Anyway, I know what you meant when you said you doubted whether the
induction was poetic, both because the authors themselves don’t treat it as such, but
more convincingly for me, because, as you say, it doesn’t really sound very poetic
(despite the stanza-like lines, repetition, off-rhyme, and meter similar to those in Laurel
Richardson’s poem). What was that you asked, about whether the hypnotic induction

script really was hypnotic though? Havens and Walters present it as an example both of a trance induction,\(^{11}\) and as therapeutic anecdote, so the claim is that it is hypnotic. However, despite what the authors assure us,\(^{12}\) perhaps the only way we could test its effectiveness and suitability is to try it out for ourselves (— I didn’t like the way you laughed when I suggested you could be my subject). I’ve thought about Havens & Walters’ script, reading it aloud with Ezra in mind, and decided that it probably wouldn’t be the most effective trance induction for someone who’s never even heard of the heroic figure (I can just see Ezra opening his eyes, just after he’s closed them, and asking ‘who?’ and wanting to know why Milton should have something to say to him. — It reminded me, funnily enough, of ‘wait until your dad gets home!’ or ‘the headmaster’s going to have something to say about this!’) I also think that Ezra wouldn’t particularly take to the bit, further on in the script, where it says

A wise old man
who could talk to you
about what you knew as a child,

running and playing
or watching clouds\(^{13}\)... 

It’s a wee bitty condescending, and I can imagine that if anything would elicit ‘resistant’ behaviour in Ezra, then that would.

I’ve gone back to my research, and I’ve found not only a real poem, but also an argument which proposes that certain poems, including the one below, are hypnotic. This should be less problematic, since it already has general recognition as a poem, and is written by a well known poet. It’s called Evangeline (you should like the title), and is 49

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\(^{11}\) Ronald Havens and Catherine Walters (1989: 49) suggest that the purpose of a trance induction is to relax the client’s muscles, create immobility, reduce breathing and heart rate, reduce or eliminate the client’s swallowing reflex, slow eye movements, and create a state of quiet receptivity and suggestibility.

\(^{12}\) Havens & Walters (1985: 50) request that the trainee hypnotist and reader of their work ‘keep in mind the fact that these trance inductions can and do work. We have used these procedures successfully with hundreds of clients.’

\(^{13}\) Havens & Walters (1989: 77).
pages long (so I won’t reproduce it here). Shall I call round and read it to you, as though it were hypnosis, and then you can tell me if you think it is trance inducing?

While Evangeline stood like one entranced, for within her
Olden memories rose, and loud in the midst of the music
Heard she the sound of the sea, and an irrepressible sadness
Came o’er her heart, and unseen she stole forth into the garden.
Beautiful was the night. Behind the black wall of the forest,
Tipping its summit with silver, arose the moon....

(Longfellow, 1911: 121-2)

Katie

*

Spell weaving poems

In his analysis of the hypnotic effectiveness of certain poems, Edward Snyder (1930) proposes that we set aside the issue of whether a poem is great (or even good), and examine instead the extent to which the poem may be ‘spellweaving,’ in contrast to (for example) ‘intellectualist’ (ibid: 3).

Any competent critic of poetry should have as part of his [sic] equipment the ability to recognize a hypnotic poem when he sees it, to experience its full value himself, to read it aloud with something of a trance-producing effect, and to criticise it from an appropriate psychological standpoint.

(ibid: 23)

Snyder proposes that certain poems are hypnotic and ‘dreamily persuasive’ (ibid: 5), and that this can explain their widespread popularity, despite criticism to the contrary from contemporary literary analysis. These poems have the power to create a deep emotional response within the listener that the literature critic ignores, in her objective
examination of the intellectual aspects of the work, such as its structure, verse, crafting and value of pictorial passages (ibid: 12). Trance inducing poems all share certain characteristics (Snyder, 1930; Snyder & Shor, 1983) which might be recognized as follows:-

- soothing patterns of sound and lulling rhythm
- freedom from abrupt changes which might ‘break the spell’ (Snyder: 42)
- vague imagery — ‘soft, shadowy outlines’ (ibid: 42) which foster a dreamy state of consciousness
- frequent repetition.
- suggestions which affect the mood of the listener
- or obscure and confusing phrases which tire the listener in her attempts to make sense of what the poet is saying.

According to Snyder, certain poems have ‘something queer about them,’ (ibid: 12) and are ‘actually and literally hypnotic’ (original emphasis, ibid: 15), able to draw the listener from everyday consciousness and into trance (for example, Henry Longfellow’s poem *Evangeline* has an ‘entrancing power well-nigh irresistible’ [ibid: 86]). Snyder proposes that, by drawing attention to the hypnotic qualities of poetry, the critic can offer a ‘sounder criticism’ (ibid: 147) of poetry for literary analysis. In inviting the analyst to consider the psychological effects of certain poems, Snyder aims to expand the scope of contemporary criticism, and ways of understanding why certain poems have the power to enthrall their listeners. Thus the hypnotic effects of a poem could enable poetry to be appraised for more than intellectual success. The various characteristic of the spellweaving poems might be examined to test the effectiveness of, for example, hypnotic imagery, rhythm, or the powerfulness of its suggestions (with the reader exploring the hypnotic effectiveness of the poem by reciting various suggested poems aloud, and seeing for himself how entranced he feels [ibid: 86]).

However, in testing the hypnotic effectiveness of poetry, we are beguiled by the persuasiveness, not so much of the cited poems, but *Snyder’s suggestion* that they are hypnotic, and by the unquestioned assumption that there is a state of hypnosis to experience in the first place. Snyder implies that trance is a state, both physical and
perceptual, which can be entered (see chapters five to eight for various analyses of hypnosis constructed both as a ‘state’ and as ‘nonstate’), and that particular forms of language, such as poetics, enable this trance state to occur. As with Brown’s description of the Tempest, what defines the poem as hypnotic is not a declaration from the original author stating this as the case, but a reading of the work (e.g., Brown, 1990; and Snyder, 1930) which argues it as such. Both Peter Brown’s description of Shakespeare, and Snyder’s description of spellweaving poetry, imply that the author has an insight into the original intentions of the poet, and as such is an authority on what was really meant.14

Spellweaving poetry and hypnosis are blackboxed as objects (the poems) and phenomena (trance) in the world, with the first step of the author’s analysis appearing to be the list of distinguishing features which Snyder states are commonly found in such trance inducing poems. The extent to which we can then speculate on the spellweaving effects of certain poems is defined by what the author describes as trance inducing characteristics (until the next turn, which might involve Snyder’s work being critically examined, for example [and off the top of my head] for his failure to list, as a vital trance inducing characteristic, a metaphoric connection with the forces of the natural world).

The study of trance inducing poetry, like the poem itself, offers various levels of meaning. One option for the researcher is to speculate upon the poet’s intention and to analyze the poem as such. Traditional literary criticism (including Snyder’s) uses as its method of analysis a detailed examination of the poem in order to suggest the effect that the poet was aiming for, by using a particular metre, metaphor, rhyme, or by choosing one word in favour of another. Another option, and a different kind of analysis altogether, would involve treating the author’s claim that certain poems are spellweaving as all that the analyst has to go on, with Snyder’s description of spellweaving poetry (in conjunction with the cited poems) taken as the data for analysis, rather than the poems themselves.15 A further option is to attend reflexively to not only

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14 Interpretations of intention form the basis of studies in psychology. For example, both cognitive and social psychology traditionally attempt to explain human behaviour in terms of how people perceive and interpret the social world (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Within psychoanalysis the psychoanalyst is trained to recognize the unconscious meaning behind the patient’s descriptions (such as Freud’s [1909] case study of Little Hans, in which the boy’s fear of horses was reinterpreted as a repressed fear of his father and of castration).

15 Discourse analysis treats language as actively constructing versions of the social world (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). From this perspective the discourse analyst can examine textual accounts, and how the author’s claims and descriptions construct, maintain and reinforce the truth of his perspective.
the author’s textual claims, but to one’s own version of analysis as a version of analysis. From this perspective the poem is not treated as data but as part of a reflexive analysis which highlights its own process as a rhetorical construction. The poem is available as an ALF to do analysis by parodying analysis, to test the limits of the research topic and methodology, and to suggest, by poetic example, the multiplicity of interpretations available in any analytical research.

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27th Sept. 1993

Dear Evangeline,

I think you were being facetious when you said that you had thought Evangeline was a dance inducing poem. You hadn’t misread my writing at all. Anyway, it wasn’t terribly kind of you to make fun of the way I read the poem out. I’m usually quite good at that sort of thing. I just, as you so uproariously pointed out, had a bit of a problem in finding the hypnotic rhythm of the poem. I started off with it very nicely, and then almost straight away the grammatical sense of the sentence imposed a break which threw my understanding of a soothing and lulling rhythm to pot. Since Snyder talks about the reading of Evangeline as if it were so easily hypnotic and alluring I must be doing something wrong somewhere.\(^{16}\) A few more readings and I’d probably get the hang of it, but there isn’t really the time before Ezra’s next session.

Evangeline, what you seemed to be saying last night is, and if you’ll excuse me I think you are being incredibly purist about this, that I can’t judge a poem as a hypnotic induction unless it was intended as that in the first place. If I follow this principal then I can’t use any of the work I’ve been researching so far — including Louis Satow’s English translation of a German translation of a Flindu Mantra from the Artharva Veda.\(^{17}\) Even though it is beautifully poetic —

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\(^{16}\) Snyder suggests that one of the variables in testing the effectiveness of a trance weaving poem is the aptitude of the reader to read the poem to its best effect — ‘[s]imilarly one reader will manage always to make Keats’s *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* carry, while another, just missing the trick of holding the monosyllables in the last line of each stanza, will do the poem scant justice (Snyder, 1930: 5-6).

\(^{17}\) Satow (1923: 24), in his discussion of ancient myths, states that this charm is a ‘poem which is certainly calculated to induce a hypnotic sleep, “a magic slumber”.’
The Bull that arose thousand-horned from the tide of the sea
By him, all powerful, we submerge the people in sleep.
No breath of air moves over the land, no eye gazes out upon it...

what we have is Satow’s claim that it is a poem originating from ancient times, and that it was intended as a hypnotic charm. To accept it as a poem written by the ancients, rather than a poetic translation written by Satow, we need to assume that the translation is a faithful replication of the original (and that in its transformation from Hindu to German to English nothing is lost and nothing is gained) — let alone that there can ever be such a thing, in translation, as a ‘faithful replication.’

If I go along with your argument, and use only a poem that was written by the author with the intention that it be used as a hypnotic induction, then I’m afraid that all I can come up with is one of Samuel Silber’s ‘hypnograms’.

In his paper on the *Induction of Hypnosis by Poetic Hypnogram*, Silber offers five examples of hypnograms written specifically to induce hypnosis and to offer therapeutic suggestions (e.g., for progressive relaxation; for eye fixation; to suggest relaxing imagery; to present sequences of seductive sound — a bit of an unfortunate description that one — and to suggest relief from inner turmoil). I’ve picked out the one he composed for relief from inner turmoil to send to you (in case all these letters are winding you up). If you think it might work, then we could follow Silber’s suggestion and modify it, or construct one of our own, in order to shape it according to (what I suggest are) Ezra’s needs.

What do you think? Samuel Silber says that his hypnograms are poetic, and he says that they are trance inducing, and therapeutic. If we are going to stick with your criteria for what constitutes a hypnotic poem (i.e., that the author says so) then this looks like it’s got to be the best one of all.

*Katie*

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18 Satow (1923: 24-25).
19 According to Samuel Silber (1980: 212), rhythmic poetry has a hypnotic, lulling effect upon the listener, as it recaptures ‘regressively the safety and security situation of the developing fetus, exposed through most of its development to the rhythms of the maternal heartbeat.’ This lullaby effect alters the listener’s heart beat, breathing and brain waves, and can be useful, not only in inducing trance, but also in making therapeutic suggestions to the hypnotized patient. Silber (1980: 213).

84
For the Supercharged, Hyperkinetic Patient to Escape from Inner Turmoil.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, slow down your swiftly speeding clock,
Tick-tock, tick-tock, slow down your speeding inner clock,
Be done with surging strained suspense
You'll function better when less tense.
When jangled nerves, thoughts in a jumble
Force brain and heart actions to fumble —
Restrain your restless rhythms racing,
Prolong what's now thru proper pacing, —
Don't lose the present just to suit your
Eager jump into the future,
Or you will find no pleasures last
And haste spurs present into past.
Internal clamor rush and riot
Must now calm down to peace and quiet.
Don't push your life and time ahead
Enjoy each fleeting moment instead.
Think clearly where you're going to
And when you get there what you'll do,
For if you rush right off again
Your jitters now are relived then.
Indulge now, in what your life lacks,
Recharge yourself, rest up, relax,
Enjoy having nothing to do,
Let soothing sleep now enfold you.21

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29th Sept. 1993
Dear Evangeline,

I’m glad you enjoyed Silber’s hypnogram. I love that bit too, you know, about the surging strained suspense and the restless rhythms racing — he obviously has a strong feel for alliteration. But your suggestion that we write a poetic induction ourselves is a great relief, particularly since I couldn’t read the hypnogram without breaking into a kind of racing, restless rhythm myself (and getting a bit tense). We could call our own poem a Trance Verse (you know, playing on the idea of a cross over, from one frame of reference to another) rather than a hypnogram. Okay, so I’ll work out the hypnotic devices and the kinds of therapeutic metaphors, and you say you’ll shape it into poetry? Wonderful! Here is, as discussed, the outline for a therapeutic metaphor, designed with Ezra in mind.

We need to create a mood of tranquillity, peace, and rest without apathy — the kind of rest that becomes inspired. There should be a transformation from being in the room listening to me doing a trance induction, to being in a place where a new vision becomes possible. Ezra has a fondness for climbing hills, which I have already incorporated into therapeutic suggestions when I work with him (such as seeing clearly, the view from the top, and the exhilaration one gets from climbing and reaching one’s goal). Maybe there can be a flight beyond the hills and the view from the ground. Perhaps an additional transformation that is both peaceful and inspirational (Ezra frequently has trouble in sleeping at night), like a bird on the wing? There needs to be something or someone that Ezra can identify with — he is an independent and capable person who is both very much in control and yet often seems to be searching for part of himself, or part of the world that has somehow eluded him. How about a metaphor of integration? Can you fit all of this together into a poem?

Katie

*
A cross over into trance verse

In the previous chapter I suggested that instead of treating the poem as data, poetry can itself be a form of reflexive analysis. The analytical presence of the poem is used to test the proposal that such forms can extend the scope of social science research. In this chapter the hypnotic poem (Scribbler and MacMillan's), although told as a story in which it is constructed, is an unseen presence. It is by virtue of the poem's absence, as MacMillan struggles to find out what a hypnotic poem is, and how it is supposed to work therapeutically, that it can become the analysis which highlights the construction of the trance inducing poem. MacMillan's letters, outlining a search for a trance induction which is both poetic and hypnotic, problematize what is constituted as hypnotic about poetry, and therapeutic about story telling, and explores the extent to which we can accept that a poem (or a trance induction) is hypnotic on the grounds that the author has claimed that it is such.

In the next chapter (four) the poem stands alone. It is offered as an example of knowledge construction, with the story of how the text came to be constructed as a therapeutic and trance inducing poem boxed within these preceding chapters. In order to become a chapter the trance verse crosses over from the poet's page to the hypnotist's script and then into the client's trance (see also chapter nine). There it hovers and quietly stirs.

*
5th October, 1993

Dear Katie,

I cannot possibly go off on holiday without thanking you properly for the wonderful experience you gave me today.

The poem (mine!) with which you started the trance gripped me immediately and I found it very difficult to control my emotions as you saw. (I can still see and hear that bird singing on the wing.) I had the impression that you were reading from notes for at least part of the time after the poem had finished and for a time I wasn’t sure whether the poem was finished or not for I think your poetic sense had affected your prose....

When I arrived yesterday, I made it clear that I was fraught with the many things I had to do before the holiday on Friday. Since I left you, however, I have felt quite calm and confident that I will do all that is necessary before Friday although it will require some determination...

Sincerely,

Ezra

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88
This is the thought that turns me slowly
Holds me down
Down deep enfolds me
Folds me into quiet places
Faces me and turns me round.
There I pause
In tranquil spaces
Moulded by the rest I found
Moulded by the peace I sought.

This is the thought that makes me listen
Listen now
How hushed the noises
Listen now
For all the voices
Merge as one.

How quiet it seems
In this tranquil room
When dreaming has begun.
How soon I let this sentence wander
Felt my senses slipping under
Slipping down beneath my feet,
Down to the place
Where
There in sleep
I am gone.
And down and on,
Down to the mountains beneath the sun.

This is the thought that leads me there now
To the path on the mountain
Where I might ascend.
To the path in the light
That is perfectly clear now,
The route I will follow
Till my journey's end.

Up there in the sky
Is a spiralling bird
Intense in flight
It wheels and spins.
This is the sound I thought I heard
The wing beats gentle
On the funnels of wind.

This is the sound I thought I heard
A call that clearly
Bade me follow.
Up on the track and over the rocks
And over the stones
And past the hollows
Where the badgers meet
Where the bears are sweet with berry and sap.
Where all creatures might
Let sleep happen now.
And sleep comes down
And sleep comes down
As soft as night.

Day has spent its sunlight
It spilled upon the mountain side
It spilled upon the trees
Pale light spun between the branches
And deepening,
Till the leaves droop,
Boughs stoop,
And roots, strong and firm within the ground,
Slip down
And rest.

Night stands still.

The violet sky
Now deep with grey
The day is done
The light is gone
The air is warm
The night is sweet with promise.

Sleep comes down
Soft as the down
From the spiralling bird
Spiralling down
And down
To rest.
This is the sound I heard
Like a sigh
Night covers me close
The quiet breath from over the peaks
Has pulled me
Into a full embrace.
Sleep's face is soft upon my skin.
And time drifts in
And time drifts by.

This place I rest
Is soft with moss.
Here sleep, at last, is deep
Amongst the furled leaves,
The bracken, bark and
Sheaves of willow-herb.
And down that's drifted
Down from the spiralling bird
In curls beneath me.

My dreams are filled with song.

I will not ask for more from sleep
Than this long call.

I need not stir till the day is cast.
The night has passed
The night is gone

The sun rises
On the edge of the mountain.

*
CHAPTER FIVE

HISTORIES OF HYPNOSIS: Tales from the fishmonger’s slab

In chapter three I provide a provisional definition of hypnosis as a state of consciousness in which the subject has a heightened susceptibility to suggestion, with this state achieved by arresting the listener’s attention, using rhythmic speech and evocative imagery (Snyder, 1930). This kind of definition maintains the links I have built, between hypnosis and poetry (Snyder, 1930), the descriptions of the poet as a hypnotic teller of tales (Brown, 1991), and the story as therapeutic (Haley, 1973). Yet offering it as a provisional definition enables me also to suggest that there are other ways to define hypnosis, and that such definitions of hypnosis, including my own, are to an ineluctable degree, worked up.

Philosophers of history have long studied the way that historians constitute the historical field as a domain to which they can gather documentary evidence and bring to bear specific theories about what really happened (White, 1973). This perspective explains history as a construction made from ready-made materials, in which various factors influence the historian’s conception of historical events and how she chooses to present them. In this chapter, a textual analysis of histories of hypnosis is used to illustrate how definitions of hypnosis cannot be separated from its historiography (and thus, of course, from the author’s theoretical approach), since the description and the history are inextricably and mutually constitutive. From this perspective, what hypnosis is, is constituted, not only in our definitions and descriptions, but also by the display of evidence and ‘references’ that support them.

Edward Carr (1961: 3) describes the historian as someone for whom ‘facts are available...in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger’s slab’ which he then ‘serves...in whatever style appeals to him.’ Although an analysis of histories of hypnosis might present them in much the same way, my own discussion constitutes histories of hypnosis as constituting what hypnosis is. Here it is all cooking and no ‘ingredients.’

According to Irving Kirsch and Steven Jay Lynn (1995: 847), thirty years ago there was a general consensus amongst researchers of hypnosis that ‘hypersuggestibility was a characteristic of the hypnotic state and that responses to suggestions were facilitated by other hypothesized characteristics of the trance state.’ However, in their brief history of the debates within psychology, the authors suggest that contemporary social psychology (nonstate theorists) now question whether hypnosis can be defined as a special process at all (e.g., Sarbin, 1989; Spanos, 1991).
There are a considerable number of texts on hypnosis (Gauld, 1992), many of which describe its history from past to present day. Where hypnosis or mesmerism originates, as traced by the author, can indicate the rhetorical work of the historiography. For example, certain histories of hypnosis describe it as a phenomenon which has always existed, and has evolved over time (Edmonston, 1981; Gravitz, 1991), even though it was not named or theorized as such (see Latour [1989] on a Whig history of science, and its rationalist assumption that electrons existed prior to Millikan’s ‘discovery’ of them). Ancient civilizations and their social rituals are cited as a way of exemplifying this progression of ideas and understandings, from the past to the present day. A biological perspective, which suggests that hypnosis is an integral part of human evolution (Brown, 1991), traces hypnosis to the beginning of human life, and supports the proposition that hypnotic communication is part of the innate workings of the human brain. Other perspectives, in suggesting that hypnosis originates with the work of Mesmer (1779) and mesmerism in the eighteenth century, can display the author’s own text as concerned with the scientific facts about hypnosis, whether to show hypnosis as a special process, or, through a re-examination of history, that hypnosis is a social construction, placed firmly in parenthesis, and as such within the (debunking) scope of experimental social psychology (e.g., Spanos, 1991; Wagstaff, 1981).

The following analysis of various historiographies suggests that hypnosis itself is constructed within the descriptions of its previous history, and examines how the author, in presenting his work as a straightforward presentation of the facts, rhetorically conveys his own text as the authoritative one.

A straightforward historical survey

Alan Gauld (1992: xv), in stating that his work, *A History of Hypnotism*, is designed as a straightforward historical survey or panorama of the literature and alleged phenomena of mesmerism and of hypnosis

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3 Although, as we shall see, Mesmer is widely condemned for the drama and seeming quackery of his healing rituals, he is also frequently accredited as the influential figure who, by insisting that his treatments had a scientific explanation (Shor, 1972: 20), and examining his own methods accordingly, set the standards for those who followed him.
opens his discussion as an unproblematic presentation of the facts, clearly separate from
the more problematical issues (the alleged phenomena) concerning the existence of
mesmerism and hypnotism. Gauld’s study of hypnotism, with its concern in outlining
theoretical conceptions of ‘hypnosis’ and its practices, suggests an academic distance
which reinforces his work as a survey. Gauld’s text appears as an objective compilation
of information from various sources, implying that this is a reliable reference book for all
researchers of hypnosis, regardless of their own theoretical perspective.5 Hypnotism is
first and foremost an object of academic interest for the social scientist, with hypnosis
carefully parenthesized as

the supposed special state which some subjects are alleged
to enter as a result of being subjected to hypnotization.

(ibid: xvi)

What hypnosis is, according to Gauld, is historically problematic, and it is his review
which will guide the reader through the claims and controversies, by tracing the history
of its practice. Gauld’s survey, as a documentation of facts, begins its history with
science, and the development of mesmerism,6 with ‘pre-mesmerism’ attended to only as
discussed by later mesmerists and hypnotists (ibid: xv). Gauld treats Mesmer’s work
sceptically, describing his doctoral dissertation rather condescendingly as a ‘little treatise’
in ‘popular Newtonian physics’ (ibid: 1). In declaring that Mesmer’s work ‘does not

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4 Throughout his book Gauld presents hypnotism as documented and events as factual, with
himself the conveyor of objective information. However, in his final paragraph (Gauld, 1992:
623-4), Gauld suddenly uses poetic descriptions to summarize hypnosis — ‘[b]ut from our
vantage point at the end of the twentieth century we can begin to see that there is no one path
by which it may be reached, no one material of which it is built, no one hidden chamber
containing all its secrets, no one key which will open all its doors, and no simple formula by
which it may be dispelled. Those who set out to investigate it should beware of the bafflements
to come.’ The rhetoric of such a metaphorical closure, coming after an objective survey of hypnotism,
brings another voice to remind the reader of the enormity of the author’s task, and poetically
draws a veil over what has been uncovered. Gauld’s articulate history of hypnotism is revealed
as all the more impressive for showing us the facts, when, as he persuades so eloquently,
hypnosis is as mysterious as ever.

5 On the back cover of Gauld’s History of Hypnotism (1992), the Times Higher Education
Supplement credits it as certain to become ‘one of the most important source books...on this
fascinating subject.’

6 While mesmerism is synonymous with hypnotism in The New Penguin English Dictionary,
Gauld (1992: xvi) distinguishes it more precisely by referring to mesmerism as the practice by
someone who adheres to the doctrine of animal magnetism (see also chapter six).
seem to have been thought eccentric' (ibid: 2), Gauld implies that it might well have been, and perhaps should be, without deflecting attention from the (documented) important influences of mesmerism and its place in the scientific history of hypnosis.

Descriptions of mesmerism, as the historical beginning of scientific practice in hypnosis, tend to portray animal magnetists as misguided, or quite simply wrong, with the author positioned as the researcher who will produce the truth about what hypnosis really is and how it works. For example, Frank Pattie (1967), in his Brief History of Hypnotism begins his description of the origins of hypnosis with the work of Mesmer, while at the same time treating mesmerism as methodologically flawed. Pattie describes ‘the remarkable blindness of Mesmer and his followers to psychological factors’ (ibid: 40) in their explanations of animal magnetism, in comparison to laboratory controlled psychological experiments in hypnosis (e.g., Hull, 1933). Pattie, in his vitriolic dismissal of prepsychological theories of hypnosis declares that mesmerism was a ‘pseudoscience’ (ibid: 41) which lost out in the end to the truth of psychological theory and psychology’s realization that hypnosis is, in fact, suggestibility (e.g., Bernheim, 1973).

Gauld’s survey, fascinatingly, can only ever trace hypnotism, directly via mesmerism, to the time of Mesmer. There is a period in time which he vaguely terms ‘pre-mesmeric “mesmerism”’ (1992: xv), but as mesmerism begins, of course, with Mesmer, ‘pre-mesmeric mesmerism’ is an anomaly (— a bit of a Latourian Whig history). Since Gauld defines hypnotism as a practice which developed after mesmerism, he rules out the possibility of a description for practices in the period before Mesmer — there are no words for any trance-like phenomenon before mesmerism, except ‘pre-mesmeric mesmerism.’ Pattie (1967: 10) also begins his history of hypnosis with Mesmer, stating that phenomena prior to Mesmer are ‘a mere catalogue of unconnected matters,’ and dismissing any notion that credence can be given to histories of hypnosis which trace hypnosis to ancient times. Histories which link healing (of pre-mesmeric times) with trance are based on ‘unfounded beliefs’ (ibid: 10), with their descriptions of magic, shamanism, and witchcraft, bearing little resemblance to hypnosis. It is interesting that Pattie’s example of unfounded histories of hypnosis (Regnier, 1891; Stoll, 1904) focus on witchcraft and demoniacal possession, practices now commonly

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7 But are what we now call ‘healing’ and ‘trance’ equivalent to what occurred in earlier times, or to what ever they called whatever occurred? This is a ‘Whorf’s dilemma’ (Edwards, in press).
regarded as the hocus pocus, superstitions or ‘old wives’ tales’ of an unenlightened pre-
scientific past. Such ‘evidence’ of ancient practices of hypnosis is cursorily dismissed by
Pattie, in favour of rigorous psychological testing. Using a rhetorical polarity of science
versus pseudoscience with real hypnosis versus witchcraft, Pattie implies the strength of
method over conjecture (Hull versus Mesmer), and the success of enlightened work as it
triumphs over blind faith.

Various other histories of hypnosis, however, in rhetorically constituting past
practices, convey a link between hypnosis and ancient practice, and as such suggest not
only a sense of the importance of hypnosis as an enduring healing method, but also how
understandings of hypnosis have progressed since ancient times.

An ancient practice

Histories of hypnosis frequently link hypnosis with ancient healing rituals,
providing evidence for the author’s definition of hypnosis as a practice rooted in the past.
In doing so the authors assume that what they call ‘hypnosis’ is indeed the same set of
phenomena — transferred through time and across cultures — known to ancient
civilizations. For example David Cheek and Leslie LeCron (1968: 16) state that

all primitive cultures, both ancient and modern,

have been aware of hypnosis

while J. Louis Orton (1951: 16) informs his readers that

the history of the art [of hypnosis] underlying

the science extends to very ancient times

and David Rowley (1986: 1) suggests that

hypnosis has a long history, going back at

least to the time of the Ancient Greeks and

Egyptians, and probably even further

Hypnosis is treated as part of human history, with the focus of attention being,
not on whether hypnosis exists (that is dealt with succinctly, in the description that it has
been around for several millennia), but on how it has developed over time. William Edmonston (1981; 1986), describes the practices within ancient Egyptian sleep temples, dedicated to the Goddess of healing, Isis, where the sick had a sleep-like trance induced upon them by temple priests (see also Bonwick, 1878).

The striking resemblance of the activities outlined above to what in later time has been successively labeled “mesmerism” and hypnosis led Charcot (1893) to write of the “faith cure” and to attribute the cures described in these ancient temples to autosuggestion.

(Edmonston, 1981: 3)

Edmonston’s description of activities that were subsequently labeled ‘mesmerism,’ and then hypnosis, neatly implies its presence as something that existed before it was named, with the label renaming the (same) phenomenon according to the currently predominant theoretical perspective. This ontological assumption that no matter what hypnosis was called, it was already there to be traced (unlike Gauld’s mesmerism and hypnosis), not only supports the reality of hypnosis, it is the essence of the phenomenon, the implicit structure which shows that regardless of what it has been named in past times and by ancient cultures, hypnosis is an integral part of human history.

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8 Note that while distancing is suggested by placing ‘mesmerism’ and ‘faith cure’ in parenthesis (Edmonston, 1981: 3), Edmonston assumes that the reality of ‘hypnosis’ is unquestioned. Mesmerism, as we shall see, is frequently treated as quackery, with Mesmer as the faith healing quack. In using parenthesis Edmonston disassociates himself with the idea that these practices might be treated in the same way as contemporary hypnosis.

9 The consequences of labelling are addressed by Howard Becker (1963) in his work on deviance, as he suggests that while labelling implies that deviant behaviour exists to be labelled in the first place, it is in fact the act of labelling which constitutes deviance, and dictates what is to be regarded as such. For Melvin Pollner (1987) ‘mundane inquiry’ traditionally implies that research consists of the researcher discovering the real properties of the topic under investigation (such as the real properties of deviance, or the real properties of hypnosis). However, Pollner (ibid: 87) suggests that ‘what is “out there” is in varying ways and to varying degrees constituted or constructed through the very acts in which a domain is conceptualized, addressed and engaged.’ For Pollner this includes Becker’s own sociological model of deviant types, which is developed to illustrate what is perceived of as deviant/non deviant behaviour.

— So, presumably, the process of ‘labelling’ is brought into being by Becker, and his readers, just as the ‘art world’ turns out, under a reflexive gaze, to be a subcategory of the ‘sociology world’ (see chapter two).
A notion of progression, highlighted by a description of historical events, can introduce contemporary research as having developed a more adequate understanding of hypnosis. This ‘progression’ can reinforce, for example, modern hypnosis as a science which has evolved from ancient practices. Melvin Gravitz, in his chapter on *Early theories of hypnosis: a clinical perspective*, (1991: 19) claims that his work traces the historical and theoretical development of hypnosis as it has evolved from quasi-science and controversy, and as it has in turn shaped the larger field of psychological understanding and treatment for several centuries.

It is interesting to note the way that Gravitz’s description of hypnosis as an actor, capable of causal effects, can support a sense of progress. Hypnosis has successfully evolved from its dubious past to shape modern psychological understandings of itself as a phenomenon. Here we are given the impression of its solid existence in the world, as a body not only shaped by theory but also able to influence further understandings. The description suggests that knowledge about hypnosis has improved with time, and is now a topic for proper (as opposed to ‘quasi’) scientific research. The assumption is that history involves a *progression* of factual discoveries, which inevitably develop our understanding of hypnosis.¹⁰

Gravitz (1991) begins his story of hypnosis in the ancient past, with descriptions of the Hindu Veda and of Wang Tai (see below) offered as evidence to support his proposal that what we now know as ‘hypnosis’ is similar in its methods of therapeutic treatment to the healing rituals of several thousand years ago.

Healing utilizing the medium of induced states of altered awareness (trances) was practised by the ancient Chinese, Egyptians, Hebrews, Indians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and others. More than 4,000 years ago, Wang Tai, the

¹⁰ This story of history as a progression of ideas is surely a naive one, viewed by contemporary historians (i.e., up to date ones, having progressed this far!) as historiographically flawed (see, for example, Barnes & Shapin, 1979; Kuhn, 1962).
founder of Chinese medicine, taught a therapeutic technique that utilized incantations and manual passes over the body of the patient. The Hindu Veda, written about 1500 BC, described similar procedures, while the Egyptians more than three millennia ago described healing methods similar to modern-day hypnosis.

(ibid: 19-20)

Gravitz’s description of the past persuasively invites the reader to make the same leap of imagination as the author, using a shared cultural understanding of hypnosis as ‘induced states of altered awareness’ (and, in case the reader needs further prompting, this is given a simplified translation of ‘[trances]’), to create a link between modern trance and ancient healing rituals. This basic notion of hypnosis (that it involves trance) is embellished with descriptions of ‘incantations and manual passes’, and ‘healing methods,’ and works to further the connection between past and present practice. ‘Incantations’ can swiftly become ‘inductions,’ while ‘healing methods’ needs no reformulation to turn it into therapy.

In assuming that his readers share the same (modern) understanding of what hypnosis actually is, Gravitz’s description of ancient texts and ancient practice is used as evidence that hypnosis has its roots well established in the past. This is done, not simply by applying the modern word ‘hypnosis’ to ancient practices, but by how these practices, and everything around them, are described similarly — e.g., ‘induced states of altered awareness,’ etc. If those descriptions are proper, then of course ‘hypnosis’ is too. Gravitz implies that the manual passes of the medical practitioner, Wang Tai, four thousand years ago in China, evoked the same responses from his patient as a hypnotist in modern Western clinical practice would evoke. Hypnosis is thus woven into the mythology of the past, while at the same time assuming that it is a special process with a set of recognizable procedures that can readily be transferred through time and across cultures. Tracing hypnosis as a development of knowledge and ideas, Gravitz discusses contemporary laboratory science research, with the suggestion that over time hypnosis has had a profound impact on clinical practice and scientific theory, progressing to become the phenomenon that has evoked ‘the current wave of worldwide scientific and clinical interest (that) is the strongest and most enduring in the long history of this
modality' (ibid: 39). Gravitz's own work is inevitably a sign of, and a contribution to, and a constitution of hypnosis as a topic that commands worldwide interest, with descriptions of its evolution from quasi-science (and quackery) to a legitimate subject of scientific analysis reinforcing its progress. In his description of ancient practice Gravitz is both able to make a link with the past, suggesting a development of ideas, and also to position himself as a modern researcher — part of 'the current wave of worldwide scientific and clinical interest' — able to see past practices for what they were, as quasi-science and controversy. Discussing the dubious reputation of hypnosis creates an opportunity for the author to position himself as someone who has investigated the controversies, as well as the laboratory studies, and as such can offer an informed view on the topic.

**Hypnosis as quackery**

A brief description of the past can highlight the historic context of previous 'misconceptions' about hypnosis which the author is then able to address and to rectify. This can have the effect of giving authority to the author's position as an expert, and credence to the (up-to-date and enlightened) version of hypnosis that the author is describing as the true one.

In their research into clinical hypnosis, David Cheek and Leslie LeCron (1968) present hypnosis in terms of defined characteristics (as paraphrased below) under the chapter heading of 'Trance Phenomena' (ibid: 44-58). The induction of such phenomena by the hypnotist, is described by the authors as the 'most reliable way of ascertaining the depth [of trance] a patient has reached' (ibid: 37).

- **Rapport:** an empathy closely related to transference, in which the subject has a strong desire to please the operator
- **Catalepsy:** a muscular rigidity or flaccidity which develops spontaneously under hypnosis
- **Muscular Inhibitions:** used to show a subject that she is in trance and responding to suggestions such as an inability to lift her arm, or unclench a fist
Hypnotic Anaesthesia:- whether pain is or is not felt, the subject does not respond to the pain stimulus

Amnesia:- spontaneous amnesia may occur following deep trance, and may also occur according to the operator’s suggestions

Posthypnotic Suggestions:- these are compulsively performed actions, suggested by the hypnotist and occurring when the subject has woken from trance

Age regression:- in complete regression, the subject will become childlike, while in partial regression he will retain his adult viewpoint

Hypnmemnesia:- subjects can be regressed to a different time period in order to, for example, remember details of a completely forgotten incident

Hallucinations:- these may be either positive or negative or both (with the subject, for example, not seeing people who are present, and hallucinating the chairs where they are sitting as empty) and may involve any one of or all of the five senses

Time Distortion:- a subject, responding to suggestion, can mentally speed up or slow time

Hypnotic Dream Production:- the production of dreams, occurring specifically when the operator suggests, and used in order for interpretations to be facilitated

Hypnotic Control of Organic Body Functions:- an ability to control the bodily functions usually under the control of the autonomic nervous system

Cheek and Le Cron (ibid: 1) offer a ‘course of instructions in hypnotic techniques in clinical application,’ with the purpose of the book, as the authors suggest, ‘to offer a working concept of hypnosis as a valuable natural phenomenon in human ecology’ (ibid). This implies that the text will concern itself with the straightforward facts about hypnosis and its clinical use. Before Cheek and Le Cron instruct their readers on the practical techniques of trance induction and hypnotherapy, the authors attend to its history and the dubious reputation it has had for quackery (and in doing so attend to the proposed audience of medical practitioners and clinicians, who, of course, would not wish to have their professional practice associated with such things). In offering a description of ‘common misconceptions’ (1968: 7) held by misguided and unenlightened individuals, and the general public, the authors invite the reader to align with the professionals.
Only recently has hypnosis been accepted by the medical profession as a valuable and legitimate means of therapy. Like the general public, physicians often regard it as something mysterious and mystical, to be avoided as savoring of quackery. Hence, in the past it has carried a stigma.

(ibid: 1-2)

Hypnosis as quackery is located in the past. There is an unambiguous challenge in Cheek and LeCron’s text that the reader either associate with the medical profession, in regarding hypnosis as a valuable means of therapy, or be seen as part of the ill-informed and out-of-date general public. The book is proposed as a handbook for medical practitioners, dentists and clinicians, instructing them on how to induce trance and use hypnosis therapeutically within their professional practice, with the reader invited (and constructed), by the context, to regard themselves as ‘professionals’ requiring a straightforward description of how to hypnotize patients, and an up to date account of the facts. Therefore the distinction between professionals and the general public is an important one. The professionals (whom we are invited to join, or align ourselves with) have realized the value and legitimacy of hypnosis while the layperson still regards it as ‘mysterious and mystical.’

The proposed reader is a textual construction, regardless of who actually reads Cheek and LeCron’s (1968) manual. In addressing a particular clientele the authors display the authority of their work to speak for and inform a professional audience. This is signalled in the way that the authors’ dogmatic tone briefly describes and, with equal brevity dismisses, a few sparsely referenced theoretical approaches. Selected theoretical approaches are reviewed and immediately dismissed, with the authors moving on to the more practical issue of how professionals can use hypnosis in their clinical practice.

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11 For example, the notion of hypnosis as role-play is treated by Cheek and LeCron (1968: 12) with disdain — ‘several psychologists’ they state, ‘claim that hypnosis is merely role-playing’ (my emphasis). The authors describe this approach as ‘unscientific,’ indeed ‘highly ridiculous,’ and like other (scantily outlined) perspectives (e.g., ‘Pavlovian theory,’ ‘Psychoanalytic theory,’ and ‘Dissociation,’) is also unable to adequately explain the complexity of hypnosis.
Cheek and LeCron’s work, by producing a past, albeit briefly, attends to the common ‘misconception’ of hypnosis as a mysterious practice, on the fringe of medicine. In doing so it intercepts a possible objection the reader may have to hypnotherapy as a medically and scientifically suspect treatment. Past stigma is described as part of the uninformed public’s misunderstanding of the topic, relegated to history, which Cheek and LeCron, as authorities on hypnosis, then proceed to correct, by presenting the facts.

Locating hypnosis in the past can be a way of addressing misconceptions about past practices, and of showing the truth of the author’s (constructed) description of hypnosis. It can also distance the ‘quasi-science’ (Gravitz, 1991) of past beliefs from a modern (including the author’s own) perspective, in order to show not only how hypnosis has endured over time, but also how understandings of the topic have progressed. While locating hypnosis at least four thousand years in the past (Gravitz, 1991) gives it a solidity and sense of endurance, the work of Peter Brown (1991) is yet more impressively ambitious, in his proposal that hypnosis, as social communication, is at the centre of human evolution, and as such is an integral part of human nature.

The hypnotic brain

Brown’s proposal that the human brain is hypnotic is illustrated in his intricately woven tale of the importance of metaphor, rhythm and rapport in poetry and storytelling within oral cultures, and how this was, and still is, an essentially hypnotic communication. In the beginning, in the story of the evolution of the hypnotic brain, Brown, refers back several million years, to the origins of the human species. He reports that ‘Lucy’ or ‘AL288’ (Johanson & Edley, 1981), is reputed to be the earliest representative of humans yet to be discovered, with her skeleton dated at three to three and a half million years old. It is there, with the origin of the human species, that the beginning of hypnosis lies, and with the hypnotic brain evolving through face to face

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12 Origin stories are always problematic and contentious. Bruno Latour and Shirley Strum (1986: 172) suggest that we treat all versions, myths and scientific stories, in the same way, with the success of the account depending upon the audience, context, and professional status of the storyteller. In contrast to hard science, where ‘lists of facts have been determined,’ in origin stories ‘little is a matter of consensus and the ‘scientific’ account cannot be defined as the one which best fits all the facts. Debates about which scientific discipline is relevant or not, which facts should be believed or excluded, how many of them are reliable, precede the debate about which account best explains the facts that have been accepted.’
communication. Proof of hypnotic social interaction is offered in Brown’s descriptions of oral cultures, and the importance of the oral poet and storyteller (see also chapter three), and evidence of biological changes in the brain. Brown suggests that everyday rhythmic changes in the brain are like the changes which occur during hypnosis, and that, rather than hypnosis being unusual or extraordinary (see Davis, 1971), it is an integral part of everyday life, a basically human aptitude for ‘hypnotic communication’ that has evolved as a natural and necessary part of physical and social development.

The brain has a story... (A) story can be constructed from a number of sources, and that story reveals that hypnotic abilities emerge from the everyday processes of communication and the way those processes are organized.

(Brown, 1991: xii).

Brown’s rhetoric is delightfully appealing. As he settles the reader down to hear the story of the brain, there is an implication that we shall at last be informed of its secrets, as the story reveals to us what happened in the dim recesses of the past (it’s a ‘whatdunnit’?) From this perspective, no matter which sources are referred to, we will find that hypnosis begins with the brain, and an essentially human ability for a particular kind of communication. This is a grand claim to make, and Brown builds its credibility in two ways. First, like Gravitz, Brown appeals to a common knowledge of the past. Second he uses his medical training in order to describe specific physiological functions. What is assumed as known allows a ‘textual opening’ (Woolgar, 1988: 74) in which a link is made between the reader’s basic understanding and the author’s final reasoning. Brown’s argument works on the basis that the reader knows enough about ‘oral culture’ to accept that poetry and story-telling are important methods of communication in pre-literate and non-literate cultures. That this is taken as a factual account of the world is important, since Brown’s argument relies on the accepted existence of oral cultures (under his particular descriptions of them) to illustrate his ‘hypnotic brain theory.’ By beginning with the conclusion, Brown sets the scene for how his text is to be read. The reader reads the subsequent documentation as evidence which supports the solution (the story of the brain and how we [or it?] came to understand that it is, and always has been, hypnotic).
This is an unconventional perspective on human evolution — one with hypnosis drawn into its beginnings, and as such the author has to work to construct its plausibility. Brown does this with scientific descriptions of human physiological responses to social communication. He describes these responses are part of normal functioning, and suggesting that hypnotic states are similar to regular, daily rhythmic changes in the brain. Brown’s argument is supported throughout with his citation of other historical documents, as the argument evolves through a historical journey which begins, as hypnosis does, with the beginning. From palaeontology and the discovered origins of the species, through Darwinism to basic, universal nonverbal communication and the importance of rhythm in social interaction, the story unfolds in a carefully detailed fashion.

Vocal intonation (and by extension breathing), facial expression, eye contact, and gesture are all bound together in an ongoing feedback system (Davis, 1982). Regulation of this system involves both hemispheres, as well as subcortical structures in the brain stem and hypothalamus, and arises from the basic metabolic rhythms of the brain.

(Brown, 1991: 38)

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Footnote to footnote 13. Is the standard academic form of this chapter simply a standard form, which could have been told differently (as, for example, a reflexive tale of a poet telling a hypnotic tale of a scientist telling a tale of the hypnotic brain)? Or is it a parody analysis of Brown’s own standard form? — Does it gain or lose credibility without alteration, according to which we take/offer it to be? Can that be glossed as ‘without alteration’? Is this yet another rhetorical question?

Footnote to footnote 14. ‘The invocation of community membership legitimates the appearance in the story of other trusted tellers of the tale, usually by way of positive citations of their work.’ (Woolgar, 1988b: 76).

This includes studies on, for example, the physical changes in bone structure, overall cortical size, and change in the shape of the vocal tract, revealing the way that humans have adapted, as social communication became more elaborate. Brown develops his discussion on the importance of face-to-face communication, citing Darwin’s work (1872, 1965) on the biological origins of facial/emotional expressions. However, this assumes the innate, universal properties of such communication. Others would dispute this (see Russell, 1994; Wierzbicka, 1995).
The importance of rhythmic communication in oral cultures *eases* poetry into the story of human evolution, and as such prepares the way for the proposed similarities between poetry and hypnosis.

(P)oetry is in a real sense hypnotic in that if it were not ‘entrancing’, it would not be effective.

*(ibid:81)*

It is now no longer a great leap, but a small step for mankind, from social communication to the hypnotic brain, as Brown (1991: 38) informs the reader that ‘(h)ypnotic language is the intensification of the everyday rhythms of language to enhance rapport.’ The connection between our general understanding of pre-literate cultures and the suggestion that the poets and story-tellers were in fact utilizing the basic human ability for ‘hypnotic communication’ has been made with authoritative ease. Brown’s story is an elegant one, with facts, like layers of tissue, moulding the shape of the hypnotic being upon the skeletal remains of its ancestors.

Brown’s documentation does more than reflect history — it constitutes *a particular kind of history*. That is, the subject of the hypnotic brain is brought into existence, and reinforced, by the text. Hypnosis is interwoven with human evolution as social communication and as such has a history of several million years. Not only is hypnosis a real phenomenon, according to this perspective, but an essentially therapeutic part of human nature.

In looking at the point in time to which histories of hypnosis suggest that hypnosis may be traced, we can see how hypnosis is constituted by the author’s description of its past. Mesmerism, the practice of animal magnetism, emerges from Mesmer’s work in the eighteenth century, with ‘pre-mesmeric mesmerism’ (Gauld, 1992) pertaining to practices *before* Mesmer as discussed after Mesmer. What is constructed linguistically (Whorf, 1956), within Gauld’s descriptions, as a practice from the time of Mesmer onwards, has also, in contrast, been described as existing *before it was labelled* either ‘hypnosis’ or ‘mesmerism’ (Edmonston, 1981). Pattie (1967) *redefines* hypnosis, in his historiography, by emphasizing the failure of the past to attend to psychological factors of hypnosis, and as such to recognize the truth about hypnosis, that it is, in fact,
suggestibility. Misconceptions about the past belong with the unenlightened general public (Cheek and LeCron, 1968), while the more up-to-date practitioner will realize that, of course, (-bearing in mind the status of the text — Cheek and LeCron’s handbook outlines the techniques of hypnotherapy), hypnosis is not quackery, but a valuable form of therapy. Brown’s (1991) description is the theoretical approach which aims to transcend theoretical approaches, as it places hypnosis within us all. His study of the hypnotic brain suggests that humans have a natural ability for trance, and that this is evidenced in a history of human evolution and social communication.

Meanwhile, my own perspective would suggest that hypnosis is constituted textually and interactionally, and is thus a social construction. (Social constructionism is, of course, extremely up to date — the ink I print this with is hardly drying on the page). However, rather than offering as evidence of my constructionist perspective an example of a social constructionist study of histories of hypnosis, I suggest that constructionist explanations of the world are also constructions, and as such are as available for reflexive analysis as any other version. Which is gratifyingly self refuting (er, exemplifying, I mean).

Hypnosis as a social construction

In any case, here’s a turn upon the spiral, another turn on analyses of histories of hypnosis. This time the turn taken examines an analysis of histories of hypnosis as a social construction, and suggests that the notion that a historical progression of ideas in hypnosis is a social construction (Spanos & Chaves, 1991) is, in the case below, an unreflexively constructed social construction. That is, in taking the reflexive next turn, I ‘deconstruct’ a social constructionist analysis as unreflexive (and therefore problematically inconsistent and asymmetrical in its approach).

Nicholas Spanos and John Chaves (1991) state that histories of hypnosis reflect the assumptions of the historians, and as such are constructed according to the sense that the writers have made of the topic and events under consideration. Historians tend to assume that hypnosis is a denotable state which has its roots in past practices. Spanos and Chaves, however, challenge these traditional assumptions, and state that, instead, hypnosis is ‘goal-directed action (ibid: 44).
According to this perspective, the term “hypnosis” does not refer to a state or condition of the person. Instead it refers to a historically and culturally rooted social construction — an interrelated set of ideas that provide guidelines concerning how hypnotists and hypnotized subjects are supposed to act and feel while enacting their respective roles in those social situations defined as hypnotic.

(ibid: 44)

The authors question the validity of standard historical studies of hypnosis which treat hypnosis as a special state, describable in terms of essential properties. They propose instead that a contextualist perspective more adequately explains hypnosis as behaviour that is governed by context, and influenced by the social, cultural and individual expectations of roles surrounding trance. To view hypnosis as a phenomenon that has developed and changed through time is ‘misleading and counterproductive’, according to Spanos and Chaves (ibid: 44), since this assumes that hypnosis exists as that which can be described and measured, regardless of context.

Spanos and Chaves’s selective use of social constructionism serves a particular purpose, not so much to deconstruct histories of hypnosis, as to show that the cited other perspectives are wrong and to support their own version of what hypnosis really is. For example, in the opening description (above) of what hypnosis is and is not, the authors use the word ‘instead’ as a precursor to the truth. Placing ‘instead’ after a description of what hypnosis is not signals the immanent presence of a contrast case, and it is here that the authors reveal the truth as legitimized by their version of social constructionism. It appears that there is a real world which lies beyond the social construction of histories of hypnosis, in which a truthful interpretation of events can correct previous false ones. However, in showing hypnosis to be ‘goal-directed action’ (ibid: 44), Spanos and Chaves do not attend to their own history of histories as a construction. There is no glimmer of reflexive recognition that the dismissal of histories of hypnosis as those which endorse particular versions of hypnosis might threaten the credibility of their own text. The authors’ up to date social constructionist approach has clearly been upstaged by the blinding light of my own reflexive alternative (as I have
shown it). Spanos and Chaves’s constructionism is not constructionist enough, and as a result is, of course, not nearly as good.

In *Death and Furniture: the rhetoric, politics and theology of bottom line arguments against relativism* Derek Edwards, Malcolm Ashmore and Jonathan Potter (1995: 26) discuss the way in which ‘methodological relativists, moderate constructivists, pragmatic pragmatists’ construct their arguments against an ‘extreme’ relativist position. For such people there is a ‘bottom line’, beyond which relativism cannot go — an objective reality which exists beyond the reaches of constructionist principles. One of the problems with adopting such a selective (bottom line) and one-sided perspective on, for example, constructionism itself, is that

the very act of producing a non-represented, unconstructed external world is inevitably representational, threatening, as soon as it is produced, to turn around upon and counter the very position it is meant to demonstrate.

*(ibid: 27)*

In the same way, Spanos and Chaves’s unreflexive use of social construction as a real historical phenomenon now threatens (in this discussion) to spiral upon their own text and to catch them in the textual act of social construction. As I shall point out (below), Spanos and Chaves construct their own historical account of histories of hypnosis as they work through time, decrying the histories as misrepresentations that have arisen because of the cited historians’ failure to understand that the events described were particular to the era in which they were manifest. For example, Spanos and Chaves claim that attempts to link ‘Asclepian temple healing’ with hypnosis usually

ignore the complex and diverse nature of the Asclepian cult and the social and cultural matrix in which it evolved

*(1991: 45)*

and that

evidence concerning a role for hypnosis in the dream healings consists almost entirely of selective citations from sources of
dubious credibility, or confusion between what was required of members of the cult and what was required of the sick who underwent dream healings.

*(ibid: 45-46)*

The authors’ authority is constructed through the implication that Spanos and Chaves are more knowledgeable than their (chosen) examples when it comes to writing about hypnosis from a historical perspective. It is displayed in their dismissal of the evidence for linking dream healing with hypnosis as being based upon sources (not cited by Spanos and Chaves) of ‘dubious credibility’, and through the information that historians have been confused over the different roles within the Asclepian cult. The authors’ conception of social constructionism is used to show a failure on the part of ‘traditional historians of hypnosis’ *(ibid: 45)* to attend to the way that social roles are particular to historic context and culture, and in this way they undermine the credibility of previous histories by showing that they were, in fact, wrong *(ibid: 52)*.

Although Spanos and Chaves use the concept of social constructionism to explain hypnosis in terms of social processes, it is a restricted version which does little more than error accounting. In a similar way to traditional studies in the sociology of science (e.g., Merton, 1970, 1973), where truth requires no explanation since it is simply science getting it right, the authors assume truth to be the correct explanation. Error, on the other hand, is subject to scrutiny because it occurs in the social world (as distinct from the material world), and in this case (Spanos and Chaves, 1991) false versions of hypnosis are those which are not properly, scientifically, social psychological. Human error occurs because the ‘traditional’ historians of hypnosis fail to realize that hypnosis is socially constructed behaviour.

Spanos and Chaves’s partial and selective version does not recognize the radical potential of a social constructionist approach which would suggest that accounts of both truth and error are socially constructed and rhetorically deployed in texts and in discourse (e.g., Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). Instead, the authors produce a description of
hypnosis, with the apparent aim that their account is the definitive one which, above all others, can explain hypnosis out of existence.\(^{17}\)

Having argued that temple healing bears only a superficial resemblance to hypnosis, with the descriptions taking the ancient rituals out of context, Spanos and Chaves (1991) then progress through time, to look at Biblical accounts of healing, and how the claim that healers used hypnosis is false.

The assumption made by historians of hypnosis that the New Testament stories can be read as history, and thereby scrutinized for evidence of hypnotic practise, is most certainly false. Instead, these stories constitute a kind of mythohistory (Leach & Aycock, 1983); they are fables that depict mythological events and personages in the form of historical narrative for the purpose of conveying a transcendental religious message (ibid: 52).

Once again the authors contrast false histories with their own perspective, using the word ‘instead’ as a signal that what is about to be related is something very different — the truth instead of misconceptions.\(^ {18}\) Spanos and Chaves question the validity of interpreting the New Testament in terms of hypnotic practices by stating that, rather than being taken as a record of events, the ‘New Testament stories’ should be viewed as myths which convey a religious message. This tautological description of how the Bible should be read is not a controversial one, and as such cannot be taken as a serious contender for dispute. However, in Spanos and Chaves’s declaration that these stories were constructed to convey a social message, they imply that there is a division between

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\(^{17}\) What Spanos and Chaves do with their description of hypnosis as a social construction is rather like the traditional historian of science, producing an account of phlogiston. Phlogiston is now regarded as ‘hypothetical’ according to an account in the Oxford English Dictionary, which states that it was once believed to exist in all combustible bodies. Its reality, however, ‘was denied by Lavoisier in 1775, and though stoutly maintained by Priestley, the belief in it was generally abandoned in 1800.’ Hypnosis might, from Spanos and Chaves’s perspective, be regarded as hypothetical, a term in parenthesis, to be explained as as-if hypnosis. Although Spanos and Chaves choose to examine descriptions of Biblical events as an example to illustrate what traditional histories of hypnosis assume, citing various texts as references to support their proposal, not all histories of hypnosis refer to Biblical events. Only two texts that I have cited in this thesis refer to Biblical healings; one (Erickson, Hershman & Sector, 1990: 3) in a vague sentence supporting ancient healing as hypnosis, and the other (Pattie 1967: 10) as a way of dismissing ancient accounts as unsubstantiated.
that which is socially constructed and that which is real. The argument is that the stories are not reliable as a record of events, because they have been constructed to convey a particular message. While this may illustrate that such stories are socially constructed, it also implies that there can be a record of the past which is not a social construction.

For example, Spanos and Chaves argue that the problem with New Testament descriptions of healings is that

none of these texts were written by eyewitnesses. In fact, the oldest Gospel (Mark) may well have been written by a Gentile rather than a Jew. This author appears to have possessed a very hazy conception of the geography of Palestine, and he placed in the mouth of Jesus expressions that a pious Jewish healer/prophet would have been very unlikely to utter.

(ibid: 49)

In presenting this as evidence of the naiveté of historians of hypnosis the authors are suggesting, in contrast, that texts written by eyewitnesses would be more reliable as accounts of what really happened in Palestine. Spanos and Chaves’s discussion, however brief, on the absence of eye witness accounts is itself a simplistic and (ironically) uninformed one, both within psychology and social constructionism, since it ignores studies on memory and the modification, fabrication and rhetoric of accounts.¹⁹

This partial and unreflexive use of a social constructionist perspective enables Spanos and Chaves to declare that Gospel stories should be understood in terms of the context and motives of the Gospel writers, and the religious messages they were attempting to convey

(ibid: 51)

¹⁹ There is a large literature on the textual construction of eye-witnessed reports, ranging from the Malinowskian ethnographic style that Clifford Geertz (1988) calls ‘I-witnessing’ (cf. Brannigan & Lynch, 1987), through studies of courtroom cross-examinations of witnesses’ testimony (e.g., Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Drew, 1990; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Molotch & Boden, 1985), to experimental studies in cognitive psychology on the unreliability and suggestibility of eyewitness memory (e.g., Egeth, 1993; Lloyd-Bostock & Clifford, 1983; Loftus & Ketcham, 1983).
without applying the principles of the above statement to their own discussion. The scope of social constructionism can be glimpsed in the declaration that historians should attend to the construction of the text. Unfortunately, however, this potential is not realized, and the irony of constructing a history of histories of hypnosis as social constructions passes the authors by.

A constructed description

In my analysis of various histories of hypnosis I have suggested some ways in which a history constitutes hypnosis as, for example, a special state involving a set of characteristics, or as a social construction and as such, (mere) goal-directed action. From a constructionist perspective Spanos and Chaves examine histories of hypnosis in order to show that 'hypnosis' is formed by the ideas people have on how they are supposed to behave as hypnotized subjects or hypnotists, in a particular context, and within a particular historic period. My own analysis suggests that Spanos and Chaves rely upon a (constructed) opposition of their own perspective, in which misguided (or quite simply wrong) traditional histories are used as a comparison for the truth about hypnosis. For Spanos and Chaves, other histories are inadequate because they are constructions rather than descriptions, whereas their own work is presented as factual — 'hypnosis' is socially constructed. The authors' history of history as a construction is itself properly descriptive of the difference between the constructed and the real.

The point here is that descriptions are always also constructions. When distinctions are made between the descriptions and constructions these distinctions are rhetorical. My own description, which suggests that descriptions of hypnosis are constructed, is no more and no less of a textual construction than the texts I have analysed. Reflexive analysis, however, can highlight not only the rhetorical effects of a history of hypnosis, but also the rhetoric of highlighting the rhetoric — the device of revealing devices. One of the best devices, I feel (in revealing devices), is the vantage point of writing now, in the author’s eternal present, after everyone referred to has been encompassed in the account which takes them all into account, and silenced by summary. It’s a kind of progress, of course, a next turn, which appears as the finest yet, though unfortunately (no, let’s be brave, fortunately) is not destined to be the final one.
In the next chapter I take another turn on descriptions of Mesmer, and in
dramatizing the attention frequently given to mesmerism in histories of hypnosis, suggest
the ways that Mesmer's showman-like practice is constituted within the drama of the
text. Furthermore, an analysis of tales about the kind of clothes that Mesmer was
reputed to wear suggests that such careful attention to detail can reinforce the
impression that Mesmer was a quack, a charlatan, a faith healer. As we shall see, it is no
coincidence that Graham Wagstaff (1981), whose theoretical conception of hypnosis is
concerned with roles and compliant behaviour, describes Mesmer as an dramatic
showman, and dwells more lavishly than most upon the small details of his robes.

But first — the simple act of giving of a name may not be quite as
straightforward as one would assume it to be...
Mr. Marlowe: What's your racket?
Mr. Amthor: I'm in a very sensitive profession Mr. Marlowe.
            I am a quack. Which is to say
            I am ahead of my time
            in the field of psychic treatment.

('Farewell My Lovely', 1944. RKO Production [Adrian Scott]).

1886 Athenaeum 6 Mar. 323/3
Verena Tarrant, daughter of a vulgar mesmerizing quack.

(Oxford English Dictionary)
CHAPTER SIX

A HISTORY OF MESMER: Pseudology or Science?

Naming the subject

Most histories of hypnosis, whether describing or debunking hypnosis, address the subject of mesmerism before long (unlike this text, an exception, of course, to its own rule, which waited until chapter five to broach the topic). Mesmerism, as emblematic of hypnosis, is incorporated into our shared, everyday cultural knowledge of the topic, regardless of whether people generally know who Mesmer was.

The story of Mesmer

- ‘Anton Mesmer’ (e.g., Weitzenhoffer, 1963: 4),
- ‘Franz Mesmer’ (e.g., Erickson, Hershman & Secter, 1990: 4),
- ‘Franz Anton Mesmer’ (e.g., Colman, 1987: 111),
- ‘Frederick Anton Mesmer’ (e.g., Colquhoun, 1833),
- ‘Friedrich Anton Mesmer’ (e.g., Björnström, 1887),
- ‘Friedrich (Franz) Anton Mesmer (1734-1815)’ (e.g., Rowley, 1986: 2]),
- ‘Friedrich (or Franz) Anton Mesmer (1733-1815)’ (e.g., Orton, 1958: 17),
- ‘Mesmer, F.A. (1779).’ (e.g., Mesmer, 1779),

1 The Oxford English Dictionary describes ‘mesmerism’ as a ‘process or practice of inducing such hypnotic state,’ and ‘mesmerize’ as the act of subjecting ‘(a person) to the influence of mesmerism...to fascinate, spellbind.’
and his credibility as a major theorist in the field of hypnosis differs between texts. In my analysis (below) of some of the various life histories of Mesmer, I suggest that the man has become a subject, with representations of him used rhetorically within the text, as grounds for the author’s own version of what hypnosis is.

Descriptions of mesmerism are often used to signal the beginning of a scientific era, and a theoretical approach to hypnosis, with Mesmer described as a practitioner who attempted (and failed) to become recognized by the prestigious scientific and medical establishments of his time (Gauld, 1992). Depending on the source, Mesmer has been acclaimed as the originator of the theory of ‘animal magnetism’ (e.g., Weitzenhoffer, 1963: 4), and accused of massively plagiarising the work of Richard Mead [1673-1754] (Pattie, 1967: 11). Whichever turn historiographies take, whether to show Mesmer’s work as the beginning of a scientific movement in hypnotism, or, with equal textual ease, to offer it as a farce, a ‘comedy of errors’ (Thornton, 1976: 43), mesmerism often signposts a turning point in history, and the foundational topic in a discussion on the truth about hypnosis.

**Animal magnetism and pseudology**

In the many histories of hypnosis the general consensus is that the theory of animal magnetism (Mesmer, 1779) proposed the human body to be diffused with magnetic fluid and as such sensitive to gravitational changes in the universe. Mesmer suggested that maladies could be cured by restoring harmony through an artificial restructuring of ‘magnetic tides’ within the body, using mineral magnets and hand movements (which later became known as ‘mesmeric passes’ and synonymous with the popular image of what hypnotists do). The difference between the various textual descriptions of animal magnetism is the way in which the generally shared information is conveyed (including Mesmer’s fall from grace), and to what effect. Milton Erickson, Seymour Hershman, and Irving Sector (1990), for example, describe how Mesmer’s ideas fell into disrepute, after an investigation by the Royal Commission, and yet
scientists ‘failed to recognize’ (ibid: 5) that suggestion and strong rapport were responsible for Mesmer’s cures. In Erickson et al’s description of Mesmer, he is hailed as the person responsible for laying ‘the foundation for modern dynamic psychiatry’ (ibid: 6). Ronald Shor (1972), on the other hand, describes Mesmer’s notion of animal magnetism differently. To Shor, Mesmer was a ‘faith healer’ (ibid: 16),2 whose main contribution to therapy was his life-time commitment to developing a scientific understanding of the manipulation of therapeutic forces.

There was little if any historic novelty in Mesmer’s therapeutic successes nor in the theoretical pseudology he derived to account for them. His contribution lay not in originality but in his insistence that the observable therapeutic effects had a scientific explanation.

(ibid:16-20)

The description of Mesmer’s technical theory of magnetism as ‘pseudology’ implies a perspective which can differentiate pseudology from true science. That perspective, as advocated by Shor, is of a cognitive psychologist, and someone who is able to assess mesmerism as a false theory. Mesmer’s reasoning is shown to be spuriously based3 on an archaic notion of external manipulations, in which the gravitational effects of the planets, or the use of artificial magnets and the mesmeric passes of the practitioner, affect bodily changes within the patient. In Shor’s work what hypnosis is, is implicated within the history of hypnosis, as he reveals that ‘prepsychological’ (ibid: 34) approaches failed to withstand rigorous scientific testing. Shor divides the history of hypnotism into four periods (‘representing stages of scientific sophistication’) (ibid: 16), as follows:

Presomnambulistic Mesmerism
Somnambulistic Mesmerism (later renamed Hypnotism)

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2 Shor (1972: 20) describes Mesmer’s therapy as ‘a combination of the ancient procedures of laying-on-of-hands with a disguised version of medieval demonic exorcism. His theory was a combination of ancient astrological concepts, medieval mysticism, and seventeenth century vitalism.’

3 According to Shor (1972: 34), Charcot (a later proponent of ‘mesmeric fluidism’) and Mesmer were theoretically wrong—‘both developed theories that were later found to be quite inaccurate and confounded with procedural artifacts.’
Shor suggests that sophistication in theories of hypnosis developed (in stages) from the time of Mesmer onwards, with the modern period (to which Shor belongs, and from which he speaks) being at the top of the hierarchy of intellectually refined approaches.

Shor’s representation of Mesmer’s work as spurious reflects a familiar story — scientific investigation uncovers pseudology, and replaces it with facts. An interesting inversion of this is the tale of how N-rays were discovered and eliminated in a brief historical episode, with the success of exposure being, not as one might expect, through the rigorous application of scientific method, but effected with showman-like flourishes. Malcolm Ashmore (1993) tells the story of the ‘standard story’ that is told about René-Prosper Blondlot, the physicist, and his discovery of N-rays, and how, briefly, N-rays ‘became one of the hottest topics in physics’ (ibid: 68). The existence of N-rays, however, was soon disaffirmed by Robert Wood, a physicist investigating Blondlot’s research claims. What Ashmore is interested in is the way that the non-existence of N-rays is supported in subsequent accounts of the events surrounding Wood’s debunking of Blondlot’s discovery (including, of course, Wood’s own accounts of the proceedings). Ashmore questions Wood’s credibility as reporter, and, in a textual analysis, suggests the rhetoric of Wood’s accounts, and how his dramatic investigations had ‘more of the flavour of stage magic, con artistry, or even slapstick’ (ibid: 89), in order to reveal the brief aberration of a science deluded by Blondlot’s discovery.

Mesmer’s work as a pseudology is constituted within Shor’s text, in much the same way as the non-existence of N-rays relied on Wood’s presentation of it as such. For Shor, the history of Mesmer’s pseudology illustrates a progression of theoretical approaches, with the untenable rejected in the quest for ‘scientific truth’ (Shor, 1972: 4) — truth, that is, being the realization that hypnosis is, of course, a psychological process dependent on individual suggestibility.4 This is also reflected in Shor’s redefinition of

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4 The work of Shor et al: (1962) on The Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility, indicates Shor’s general approach to hypnosis. This traditional psychological view, of hypnosis as suggestibility, is reflected in (a quick glance at) the first social psychology textbook to hand. Wrightsman (1972), informs the reader that ‘(i)n fact, hypnosis may be viewed as a state of extreme suggestibility: the deeply hypnotized person is simply extremely suggestible and, according to some conceptions (Sarbin & Coe, 1972), adopts a subservient, compliant, helpful role and comes to behave according to that role’ (ibid: 633. Original emphasis).
Mesmer’s work as ‘faith healing’ *(ibid: 20)*, which places the credit for any possible cures on the power of suggestion rather than on Mesmer’s detailed and technical thesis on magnetic influences. It is interesting to note that while Shor *(ibid)* and Erickson et al (1990) both state that Mesmer’s therapeutic success was due to suggestibility, and not animal magnetism, they do so to different effect. Erickson et al blame science for its failure to notice the truth about mesmerism (thus maintaining their suggestion that Mesmer should be credited for his foundational work in psychiatry), whereas Shor, in describing the importance of Mesmer’s work as lying in his scientific approach to observable effects, is still able to condemn Mesmer as misguided and mesmeric theory as false.

Stressing the importance of scientific investigation, Shor, in his discussion on the fundamental problems of hypnosis research, points out that Mesmer has frequently been regarded as a ‘charlatan, a simpleton, and a plagiarist’ (Shor, 1972: 34). This unreferenced and damning description in itself would be hard to sustain within the framework of Shor’s discussion. What it can do, however, is work as a contrast to reveal that although Shor is aware of vehement criticism of Mesmer, he takes a more liberal (and perhaps, therefore, a more objective) view of Mesmer’s role in the historic progress of hypnosis. Rather than dismissing Mesmer as a charlatan, who knowingly presents himself in a misleading way, Shor treats him as misguided. Shor suggests that while other sources may have regarded Mesmer as a trickster, a more accurate (and modern) psychological approach would concede that Mesmer believed his practice to be scientific — it was just that the mesmerist was unfortunately deluded (cf. Ashmore, 1993, on Blondlot as a victim of self-delusion). The sophistication of modern psychology is thus able to interpret Mesmer’s actions as well meaning but false, retaining the value of his methods while discarding his theoretical assumptions.

Mesmer’s fall from grace, as a historical event, reinforces the primacy of science and the way that any practice needs to withstand the rigours of testing in order to be recognized as scientific. Thus, although Mesmer may have contributed to the spirit of scientific investigation, and could as such be regarded as the founder of scientific hypnotism, the official ‘debunking’ of animal magnetism revealed his method and theory

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5 This may be contrasted with Vincent Buranelli’s (1975: 37) description of Mesmer — ‘broad and deep in his culture, holder of the PhD and the MD, professionally equipped in philosophy, theology and medicine, knowledgeable in the sciences, experimental and speculative...’
to have been 'untenable from the standpoint of objective, scientific truth' (Shor, 1972: 20).

In discussing the pseudology of mesmerism, Shor (ibid: 21) refers to reports by the Royal Commissioners, produced in 1784, which 'disaffirmed the existence and value of Animal Magnetism.' By illustrating false perspectives, in his history of hypnosis, Shor is able, by implication, to show the truth. Not only is his account of Mesmer’s intention to be a serious practitioner of science correct, but also his account of Mesmer’s delusion is the correct, indeed the only one.

A mysterious soul

Shor places emphasis on objectivity and scientific method as synonymous with the truth as it guides the researcher of hypnosis towards a better understanding of the phenomenon. However, although Shor stresses the importance of an objective scientific method, in his summary of historic perspectives of hypnosis, he alludes to a potential conflict between research and practice. Apparently, the dangers of rigorous experimental investigation could involve the scientist, with an ‘attitude of disciplined scepticism,’ becoming an ‘inept hypnotist’ (Shor, 1972: 39) — as though hypnosis requires a certain mental position which can elude the scientist. On the other hand, a danger for the clinical practitioner of hypnosis, subjectively involved in her practice, is that she may be blinded to the truth of hypnosis by her emotional responses to the

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6 Although the Royal Commissioners reports are cited as evidencing Mesmer's lack of theoretical credibility (see also Colman, 1987) and his subsequent fall from favour, the reports themselves, it has been suggested were (not surprisingly) influenced by governmental pressure. Alan Gauld (1992: 9) suggests that the French government of the time was ‘alarmed by the spread of animal magnetism.’ This alarm was not lessened by the fact that mesmerism had been linked with ideas of democracy, harmony, and the production of a new physical and moral world. Both of the negative reports (which 'no doubt suited the government very well' [ibid: 9]) of the commissions, whose prime question was not whether animal magnetism worked, but whether it existed, consisted of results from a series of experiments which concluded that patient’s responses were an effect of imagination not mesmerism.

7 ‘[O]f equal importance to the scientist are the conditions under which the facts were gathered. The conditions must be specified precisely so that procedures can be closely replicated and systematically varied in continuing research. The scientific method, in other words, requires that knowledge be formulated in terms amenable to minute scrutiny of all phases of the knowledge-generating process.’ (Shor, 1972: 33-34).

8 Links have been made between Freud’s rejection of hypnosis and its subsequent fall from favour. A useful defence against Freud’s dismissal of hypnotism, made by proponents of hypnosis, is that it was discarded not because it didn’t exist, but because Freud actually wasn’t very good at it after all (McKenna, 1993: 5).
hypnotic situation. These two arguments are familiar in other settings, where there is an issue involving the scientific testing. For example, with possible pseudo-phenomena such as ESP, ghosts, telekinesis, etc., the failure of these to show up under experimental conditions is blamed, by practitioners and adherents, on the inhibiting effects of these conditions — they are not ‘conducive’ to the phenomena (e.g., ‘Blondlot intervenes,’ in Ashmore, 1993). With these and other topics, such as talking apes (i.e., Savage-Rumbaugh & Lewin, 1994), there is the notion, as with Blondlot the physicist, and as with the hypnotist, that the practitioner-researcher is too involved to be objective.

This apparently unresolvable dilemma of the effects of science on practice, and vice versa, is wistfully broached by Jesse Gordon (1967) in his brief introduction to the Handbook of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis. According to Gordon, scientific respectability is often achieved at the expense of romance, with the mystery and magic of hypnosis being lost under the penetrating gaze of objectivity.

Hypnosis is becoming socially acceptable. It may have seemed, in its two centuries’ climb upward from the elegant slum of Mesmer’s baquet, as if it would never make it — or that if it did enter the prestige world of scientific respectability, it would be too late to save its soul.

(ibid: 3)

Mesmer here is seen as part of a romantic past, seedy but charismatic, with the cost of respectability being a loss of identity, and the soul of hypnosis, its mystery, (using some of Gordon’s exuberantly rich mix of metaphors), fading like the Cheshire cat’s smile ‘in an ineffable smog of epiphenomena and artificiality’ (ibid: 3). Gordon’s dilemma retains the mysteriousness of hypnosis while showing the extent to which it has attracted scientific interest. He also attends to suggestions that, as editor of a collection of papers taking different perspectives on hypnosis, the book might well ‘lack the sense of unity and coherence that can be imposed on the material by a single author’ (ibid: 9). His introduction thus calls for a study which preserves the integrity of the author, and implies in this how the various perspectives put forward by the different authors of the chapters on hypnosis should be read. For Gordon, the dilemma is an editorial one which
unites the various theoretical perspectives of his various authors, whereas the dilemma in Shor’s description is of Mesmer as a man passionately involved in his work (see also Gauld, 1992), but blinkered by an approach more suited to medieval mysticism than modern science. However, this dilemma does not detract from the importance of scientific practice. It rhetorically highlights the need to do it properly. Furthermore, within this construction of conflicting approaches nestles the solidity of hypnosis. There is also a way of doing hypnosis properly — if the experimenter does not evoke trance-like responses from the subject, it is not because hypnosis does not exist, it is because the experimenter has become too objective.

What has been at dispute, and what Shor’s text resolves, is the subject of mesmerism/hypnosis. It is clearly the case, as Shor (1972: 20) points out, that the dramatic convulsions of Mesmer’s patients ‘were purely artefacts of mutually shared expectations’ rather than the physical influence of cosmic fluids upon the body, and in this, historical mesmerism and modern hypnosis are unquestionably the same. Shor, in his history of hypnosis, treats mesmerism as the phenomenon which later became known as hypnosis. Mesmer’s theory of animal magnetism, from this perspective, was revealed by later scientific research to have been wrong, with the truth being that mesmerism/hypnosis is in fact characterized by suggestibility.

Robes as rhetoric

In the cited histories of hypnosis (below), the dramatic re-enactment of the peculiarities behind Mesmer’s practice — such as the information that he played a glass harmonica or dressed in lilac robes — brings Mesmer’s showmanship solidly into existence, with the text’s historical accuracy bolstered by a graphic and narrative detail displaying the events of the past as beyond question. It is such attention to detail, in offering a factual account of the past, which makes its truthfulness difficult to refute.9 For example, the image of Mesmer dressed in

9 Just as realists may use the solidity of furniture to ‘prove’ its existence, so historians of mesmerism use the solidity of events to show the truth of its reality. See Edwards & Potter (1992); Edwards, Ashmore & Potter (1995); Wooffitt (1992), for discussions on the way that graphic detail and narrative sequence as reality construction devices are used in contexts of doubt (cf. Latour, 1987 on detail). Details also emphasise the truth of the report and therefore the trustworthiness of the reporter (Ashmore, 1993). See also Atkinson (1990); Clifford & Marcus (1986); Geertz (1988), for ethnographic descriptions as rhetoric.
• a dramatic gown (Sarbin, 1962: 753)
• lilac robes (Rowley, 1986: 4)
• a coat of lilac silk (Binet and Féré, 1901: 9)
• a long robe of lilac coloured silk embroidered with gold flowers (Wagstaff, 1981: 2)
• a coat and breeches of purple silk (Buranelli, 1976: 126)

is so colourful and vivid that his presence is almost tangible, rising out of the paragraphs of descriptive text to demonstrate the events as they happened. Not only does the attention to detail give a credible sense of factuality, it also conveys what kind of person Mesmer was. While standard historical accounts of contributors to the field of psychology do not generally focus, for example, on the colour of Freud’s cravat as he sat in his consulting room, or what style of jacket Skinner wore while conducting his laboratory experiments, in contrast, a recurring feature within descriptions of Mesmer is this fascination with his attire. These descriptions of Mesmer in a gown, or robes, or breeches of purple silk, are not simply a side fashion interest for those eager to know such things (such accounts are conspicuous here by their absence from other descriptions), but work rhetorically. Who else but a showman would wear such clothes (robes and gowns, a display of pomps and vanity), in such a colour (the gaudy colour of kings, for those with regal aspirations) and in such a material (the cloth of gentry, the dress of a dandy) — ‘a navy blue serge suit’ would convey a very different sense not only of Mesmer’s appearance, but of the kinds of activities he was up to.

The clothes and trappings, described as an integral part of Mesmer’s practice, set the scene and give atmosphere to the drama of mesmerism without requiring explanation. As with Shor’s discussion, in which mesmerism is taken for granted to be the same kind of phenomena as hypnosis and dependent on suggestibility, so the descriptions of Mesmer’s breeches of purple silk and dramatic gowns imply and assume that the effectiveness of Mesmer’s work on his patients was due, not to animal magnetism, but to the powerful effects of suggestion.

For Graham Wagstaff (1981), hypnosis, or rather hypnotic behaviour, is role-governed and social, with compliance and suggestibility affecting what happens in the hypnotic situation. In his historical account of hypnosis, Wagstaff describes Mesmer’s
practices in such a way as to highlight the emotional tensions involved in his treatments, with a focus on the erotic manipulations of the female patients by the male mesmerists (see also Scene 2, below). Wagstaff describes subsequent crises as part of a social and historical context, where expectations about what should happen in these situations governed what then occurred, with the atmospheric oppression of the humid, draped and darkened room, the powerful entrance of Mesmer in robes, and the mesmeric passes manipulating emotional tension, all contributing to the climactic release of convulsive-like behaviour in his patients.

Wagstaff's careful involvement in the details of Mesmer's attire depicts his clothes as symbolic of the man's impact upon his patients. That is, Wagstaff's description of Mesmer's robe delicately offers proof of his flamboyance and showmanship. The reader has an impression of the mesmerist in his long robe of lilac coloured silk, and the showy richness of embroidered gold flowers, with a sense of the immediate message this would convey to Mesmer's patients. The robe, as a symbol of mysticism and power, implies that the wearer of such a garb should be perceived as powerful, with the observer subject to this powerful influence. The reader, however, has an advantage over Mesmer's patients. Times have changed, according to Wagstaff, and hypnosis, as therapy, no longer demands crises and dramatic entrance into trance, but rather a quieter drifting into an apparent state of relaxation. Wagstaff's presentation of Mesmer is much more akin to modern stage hypnosis than modern therapy, and this is how we are implicitly guided to view Mesmer. He is a showman in a faintly ridiculous gown, using the patient's compliant behaviour in order to effect his dramatic therapy.

Wagstaff begins his short history of hypnosis by informing his reader that 'the discovery of hypnosis is generally attributed to Franz Anton Mesmer' (ibid: 2). He then

10 The commissioners of the Royal Society of Medicine warned of the moral dangers in the practice of animal magnetism, since it included male practitioners using 'magnetism' on female patients. This would involve, according to Gauld (1992: 29), contact 'even in the neighbourhood of the most tender parts of the body.' Gauld quotes from the report that in highly strung women 'the end of the sweetest emotions, is often a sort of convulsion; this state is succeeded by... a sort of sleep of the senses' (Burdin and Dubois, 1841: 95-96). [Rapport des commissaires chargés par le Roi (1784); and Rapport des commissaires de la Société Royal de Médecin (1784); are both reprinted in Burdin and Dubois (1841)].

11 As Wagstaff informs us 'the ecstatic outbursts of Mesmer's ladies seem a far cry from the modern hypnotic subject quietly doing his automatic writing or being operated upon.' (Wagstaff, 1981: 3)

12 Furthermore, for Wagstaff (1981: 19), the stage hypnotist is a trickster who uses 'devious methods' to fool his audience.
proceeds to construct a version of Mesmer as lecherous and flamboyant, with the strength of his argument being in the way that he dismisses Mesmer, through an attention to detail, painting a picture of the absurd without claiming it to be so. This image of hypnosis as stage managed is consistent throughout his book, which is dedicated to debunking hypnosis, and to replacing it with a ‘non-state’ version, ‘hypnosis’ as merely an act of compliance, conformity, role-play, a behaviour governed by the subject’s social and cultural situation (see chapter 8).

A social psychology of hypnosis

By deconstructing Mesmer’s practice and revealing it as that which can be explained, not as magic, mysticism, due to the power of the planets, nor yet the magnetic influences of the practitioner, Wagstaff constructs his own perspective, that of a social psychologist, as authoritative in revealing the truth of the matter. Mesmerism can be adequately explained from the perspective of social psychology as a mundane social phenomenon. What Wagstaff reveals, not only in his description of Mesmer, but also in his account of differing theoretical perspectives, is that hypnosis can be understood as the effects of preconceptions and expectations. This is shown in descriptions of how hypnotic responses seem to have changed according to the predominant theory of hypnosis of the time.

Thus Mesmer, who believed that he was transmitting an invisible fluid into his patients which would excite them, managed to send a lot of them into a crisis.

On the other hand, Braid believed that the power resided in the patient and was not expecting hypnosis to produce some dramatic spectacle, and his subjects were far more quiet and well-behaved.

Charcot, looking for morbid symptoms, produced stages of catalepsy, lethargy and somnambulism in his patients, who incidentally, like Mesmer’s, were specially ‘prepared’ by
assistants before the master arrived.

Bernheim, rejecting Charcot’s claims, observed Charcot’s three stages in one in several thousand patients, and this single instance was found in one of Charcot’s former patients. However, what is also important is that so many of these ideas and effects have merged to produce popular assumptions about hypnosis, and the concept which seems to bind these elements is that of the hypnotic ‘trance’.

(Wagstaff, 1981: 6)

The list of three historical figures—Mesmer, Braid and Charcot, supports Wagstaff’s proposal that expectations influence subsequent behaviour. In contrast, reference to the critic, Bernheim, does not look at his expectations of hypnotic behaviour, but rather, his rejection of Charcot’s claims (and how the only incidence that Bernheim found which might have supported Charcot’s ‘three stages’ was in fact from one of Charcot’s former patients, who was therefore likely to have been ‘prepared’ by Charcot’s expectations). Wagstaff’s list is supporting evidence that the beliefs and expectations of both practitioner and patient are responsible for setting the scene and executing the roles of the performers in trance. The description of Mesmer, who, through his beliefs, ‘managed’ to send ‘a lot of them’ into crisis, evokes the impression first of a struggle, with Mesmer pulling ‘crisis’ off despite the absurdity of the belief. Second, Wagstaff’s description implies, once again, the act of stage direction, with a manager setting the scene for how the (submissive) actor is to be directed in her role as patient.

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13 Three is an effective number in conveying a sense of completeness, or of a rhetorically adequate sample (see Atkinson, 1984; Drew, 1990; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Jefferson, 1990).

14 Hippolyte Bernheim has been portrayed as particularly interested in suggestion as an underlying factor in hypnosis (see Rowley, 1986: 9).

15 At a further point in his book Wagstaff (1981: 215) offers Thornton’s work on Hypnotism, Hysteria and Epilepsy (1976), as an additional explanation for crisis. The conditions under which Mesmer operated (the reflected light from the mirrors in the stuffy, darkened room, the music, the physical manipulations of patient’s bodies) brought about epileptic seizures, rather than therapeutic crisis — ‘Thornton (1976) provides a most convincing case for the proposition that the source of the behaviours we now attribute to ‘hypnosis’ resulted from the misdiagnosis of an ancient malady, epilepsy.’
Braid\textsuperscript{16} is described as having different expectations and consequently 'his patients were far more quiet and well-behaved.' A notion of manipulation, or direction, is never far away in Wagstaff's account of hypnosis, constant through the story of change, in which the behaviour of the patient is managed by the expectations generated by the practitioner's theory. Likewise, a description of Charcot\textsuperscript{17} shows that although he 'produced' catalepsy in his 'specially "prepared"' patients, this effect was later disproved by Bernheim (note the implied tension of patients being prepared for the master's arrival — Wagstaff's account gives an impression of malleable patients ripe with expectancy, primed to produce hypnotic effects on cue).

The effect of Wagstaff's description of the selected theorists whose work followed Mesmer's is to highlight hypnosis as a social phenomenon, despite their original propositions, and in doing so Wagstaff is able to demystify any modern 'misconceptions' about trance. In his history of hypnosis Wagstaff reveals how hypnosis got to be understood, for example, as mysterious, or dramatic, or a strange kind of sleep, by citing past treatments and stating that the beliefs surrounding the treatment were formed by the patients complying with the practitioner's expectations. These historical beliefs have blended, from different eras and perspectives, to form what can often seem to be a confusion and contradiction of popular assumptions. It is not surprising that it is Wagstaff's own perspective, as a social psychologist explaining hypnosis, that clarifies any confusion over what hypnosis really is. His account is in effect the master one, the template beneath which all previous perspectives are now to be read and understood.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} James Braid (1899) is generally cited as the surgeon who, through his interest in the effects of trance on the nervous system, redefined mesmerism as 'nervous sleep' ('neurohypnology' — later shortened to 'neurypnology' — translates from Greek as the 'study of nervous sleep' and as such is part of the story about the origins of 'hypnosis', and its metamorphosis from mesmerism).

\textsuperscript{17} Jean Martin Charcot is given credit for his clinical observations but rarely for his theoretical stance on hypnosis. His contributions to its study have been described as 'only of historical interest' (Sarbin, 1962: 763), and he has frequently been dismissed as a mesmerist. Apparently he was a neurologist whose interest in hypnosis lay in the effects of certain metals and magnets on the nervous system, and the artificial production of (hysterical) convulsions in his patients. Depending on the source, emphasis is placed upon Charcot's influence over his student, Sigmund Freud, and his career, (e.g., 'Freud was exposed to Charcot's influential views on mental disorder and hypnosis, and as a result he changed his career choice from neurology to psychopathology.' Gravitz, 1991: 34) or his lack of influence upon his student (e.g., 'Freud, as a young neurologist, had studied with Charcot, but was unimpressed with his approach'. Sarbin, 1962: 763)

\textsuperscript{18} See also chapter eight of this thesis for an analysis of Wagstaff's 'debunking' of hypnosis as a phenomenon, and a rhetorical presentation of his own perspective of trance as role-play.
Wagstaff explains hypnosis as compliant or conformist behaviour, as role enactment influenced by beliefs. In demystifying trance he adopts a materialist perspective, holding onto hypnosis throughout his book, from title to closure (his aim is to put hypnosis in parenthesis [Wagstaff, 1981: preface], put in its place, with a place — social psychology — to put it in). In describing what hypnosis really is, Wagstaff is another theorist with another explanation (and perhaps he is even another Mesmer, an artful persuader, rendering his readers compliant and ready to view hypnosis just as Wagstaff expects it to be read). Such accounts may differ but the overall result is the same. Mesmerism, hypnosis, role enactment — all perpetuate the reification of the subject in the guise of theories about animal magnetism, somnambulism, or compliance.

In presenting various histories of hypnosis, I suggest that hypnosis is constituted within the text. However, I do not claim that this is the definitive version of hypnosis that psychology requires. This text is also an account, like Wagstaff’s, like Shor’s, or like Mesmer’s, with hypnosis redefined as constructed intertextually and in talk. Textual and discourse analysis focus upon the topic as it is created in the words of the interlocutors or the author and her citations. From this perspective the reification of the subject, as that which exists and needs only a true account to give it its proper place in the world, is a rhetorical move, which then affords the author the opportunity to produce the truth of the matter. In looking at the way in which a description holds together (or doesn’t) rhetorically — that is, by deconstructing the process that brings a particular version of hypnosis into being — I do not set out to negate the author/speaker’s perspective, (although certain accounts can seem more admirable or persuasive than others), but to topicalize it.

Mesmer in the footlights

The story of Mesmer the showman, be it in the guise of faith-healer, trickster, or compelling and charismatic character, is revealed and re-enacted with each telling, in a way similar to how the story of Wood, the showman, reveals time and time again (as if by replication) the non-existence of N-rays (Ashmore, 1993). This drama of mesmerism has endured many recitations, in which Mesmer’s status as a kind of showman is built up, ironically enough, by the authors’ liberal use of dramatic textual devices.
In the following sequence I topicalize my subject, the way in which dramatic presentations of Mesmer effectively portray the drama of his practice, by parodying stage managed textual descriptions. This use of parody as a form of analysis (Mulkay, 1991) echoes and exaggerates the dramatic licence of the various histories of Mesmer, in order to highlight the work that not only ‘content’ can achieve in a text, but also how style itself is a rhetorical device which brings a particular sort of Mesmer into being.

It is important, I think, to recognize that parody is not simply a textual form designed to make fun of original texts. Rather, ridicule and humour, as well as exaggeration and condensation, selection and paraphrase, are all used as a means of informing the reader about the nature of the original text. (Mulkay, 1991: 171)

The ALF, as parody, dramatically illustrates the drama evoked in the \textit{descriptions} of mesmerism, and to suggest how the \textit{style} of the text enacts a persuasive tale of Mesmer the showman. Histories of hypnosis generally proceed nicely, with traditional academic descriptions including selective quotes and references, supporting the author’s portrayal of hypnosis. Until, that is, the history addresses the subject of Mesmer, and then something quite dramatic happens. The text suddenly becomes suffused with atmosphere, like a stage set, with the author, as director, presenting to the reader, as audience, a dramatic tale of the past. The author in such a case evokes a dramatic style of description in order to display the perceived drama of Mesmer’s work.

*
SCENE 1
Around the baquet

The room is softly lit. Music seeps eerily between folds of humid air and expectation. Mirrors, dark reflections amongst the drapery, reflect the seated figures, echoing the tense shape of their limbs. They breathe as though caught in a tight glass case, pulses fluttering on the edge. Now, a figure dressed lavishly in lilac silk enters, and slowly bows. It is the Master of Mesmerism. The subjects remembered how they had

.....entered a dimly lit, mirrored room complete with background music where they were confronted by a number of large oak vats. These vats contained water, iron filings and bottles. The patients were instructed to grasp the metal rods protruding from the bottles. Mesmer dressed in lilac robes and waving a wand....

moved slowly amongst his subjects, pausing to touch the exposed skin on a neck, an arm, a quivering shoulder...

Cords connected the patients to each other and to the baquet, in order to enhance the flow of the magnetic fluid. Musical instruments played soothing melodies in an anteroom; mirrors designed to reflect the magnetic fluid were everywhere; thick drapes allowed only dim light to enter; and temperature, humidity, sound and air were all regulated in accord with Mesmer’s theories.

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19 According to Sarbin (1962: 752-753), a baquet ‘is a trough around which more than thirty persons could be magnetized at the same time. Iron filings and other minerals, as well as bottles, were placed in the bottom of the trough. Through holes in the top of the case protruded a number of iron rods. The patients were connected to the baquet by means of cords...’


From somewhere in the oppressive room, behind the subjects and out of sight, some kind of soft, alluring music played. Was it that this

...soft music came from a wind instrument, a pianoforte, or a glass harmonica played by Mesmer.

The patients themselves sat in silence. 22

The patients sat in silence with all senses in chaos, longing and yet dreading the treatment, anticipating the coming of Mesmer's touch as the thing which would exacerbate crisis. The cords, attaching each figure to the person seated next to them, seemed to symbolize their captive attention, like lambs to the slaughter, the willing subjects awaited the Master of animal magnetism...

Scene 2

Mesmeric passes

Mesmer moves amongst his patients, a powerful figure casting shadows across the glass. His assistants follow, mirroring his deportment and his style. He pauses, and pressing his fingers together into the shape of an erect pyramid, he strokes down the spine of a young woman seated at the baquet. She cries out, swoons, and is scooped up by the waiting assistants. Mesmer disappears once more.

Meanwhile the subjects sit in silence, mesmerized by this spectacle, sometimes clenching and unclenching their fingers, and

...sometimes joining hands and listening to the soft music played in an adjacent room. After a while Mesmer would appear, pointing his finger or an iron rod towards one of the group, who would then experience queer sensations and a great variety of other phenomena ranging from trembling to convulsions. 23

Mesmer bends towards each convulsing figure

....massaging the hypochondriac (ovarian) region and the lower abdomen, sometimes for hours. 24

He had

....employed young and virile assistants mesmerisers whose job it was to pour streams of magnetic fluid over the patients, and to apply various therapeutic techniques such as embracing them between the knees, rubbing them down the spine, and ‘using gentle pressure upon the breasts of the ladies’ (p.279). 25

Scene 3
Crises

As another convulsing figure drops to the floor under Mesmer’s attentions, his assistants move forward swiftly, to carry her off. The room is now filled with the screams, cries and exaltations of patients in crisis, or patients expecting soon to be in crisis. Mesmer lifts his magnetic wand and smiles. The climactic stage of healing has been reached, with everything going as planned. As patients in crisis

....they would be carried off into an adjoining padded Chambre de Crises where they could convulse freely without self-injury. 26

These convulsions are remarkable for their number, duration, and force, and have been known to persist for more than three hours. They are characterized by involuntary, jerking movements in all the limbs, and in the whole body, by contraction of the throat, by twitchings in the hypochondriac and epigastric regions, by dimness and rolling of the eyes, by piercing cries, tears, hiccough, and immoderate laughter.27

Scene 4 (First version)
The erotic tale: Transference

A young patient, loosely bound to the oak baquet by silken cords, waited for the attentions of the mesmerist. She was already quivering when he came upon her, his large hands focused with gratifying intensity on the tiny details of her skin. Already she could feel the pulsing magnetic forces transferring through his touch. Soon they would go deep within her, to the source of her distress. She is, however, no different from all the others.

Young women were so much gratified by the crises, that they begged to be thrown into it anew; they followed Mesmer through the hall, and confessed that it was impossible not to be warmly attached to the magnetizer's person.28

27 Binet & Féré (1901: 9).
28 Binet & Féré (1901: 11).
Scene 4 (Second version)
The horror story: Victims

Under Mesmer's fixed stare the patient fell into convulsions. Around the room bodies rolled and jerked in terrifying contortions, as though the very devil possessed their tormented forms. Shrieking and crying, they were dragged from the room by Mesmer's accomplices, confined to a padded cell and left in that wailing den of madness until they had become subdued. The subjects would be

....severe and frequent convulsive fits around the bacquet (sic).

There is no question of their being feigned or as some people have since claimed, 'hysterical'. The victims became blue in the face, and foamed at the mouth with bloodstained fluid and had many other signs not able to be simulated.29

By nightfall the patients have gone. Mesmer wanders through his chambers with a sense of satisfaction, tallying today's cures at the baquet, and musing on the effectiveness of his magnetic treatments. His methods, he proudly notes, are rigorously scientific and will, he is certain, change the course of treatment from this date forward. One day, he tells himself, Franz Anton Mesmer will become a household name.

*  

29 Thornton (1976: 8).
The persuaders

The reflexive spiralling of the above analysis, a parody performance of textual performances of what is portrayed to be a mesmeric performance, suggests that the cast of persuaders is not limited to Mesmer and later hypnotists. In conveying a persuasive image of Mesmer, the faith healer, charlatan, quack, misguided practitioner, pseudoscientist, through an atmospheric evocation of his treatment sessions, the author implicitly invites the reader to imagine the (reconstructed) events as if they were happening, and as if he were there, able to sense the quivering anticipation (here I go again) of Mesmer's subjects, and the powerful (and entrancing) entrance of the man in vivid silken robes. Not only does this portrayal convey Mesmer as a showman, it also sets the scene for an interpretation which shows that what was going on in these situations was due to the effects of suggestions, or roles, or compliance, and not the restructuring of magnetic tides within the patient's body.

My own portrayal of histories of mesmerism suggests that Mesmer has become each author's subject, the focus of attention, which is used to symbolize and persuasively convey the author's perspective on hypnosis. The modern science of cognitive and social psychology is reflexively confirmed by the author's description of Mesmer, with his robes, his treatment chambers, his baquet, and assistants, and how such trappings convey Mesmer as a powerful figure, and as such create a situation of extreme suggestibility. The important point in my own analysis is not whether Mesmer really did wear purple silk, or worked in a stuffy room, but how these descriptions work aesthetically and rhetorically. In the next chapter, I examine various accounts of Milton Erickson, a contemporary hypnotist, and how his preference for dressing in purple (never before juxtaposed with Mesmer's!) is explained as a feature of his special form of colour blindness. This immediately raises such issues as

- whether Mesmer was actually colour blind
- to what extent 'colour blindness' is a construction
- what further descriptions of hypnotists who dress in purple can tell us about hypnosis.

*
I think Erickson would be pleased that his years of hard work, innovating new ways to influence people, have resulted in such a following. He might be less pleased about the cult being built around him, since he was such a practical man. However, he also liked to create an aura of mystery about his ways of working. At one time I considered entitling this book “Sorcery and Common Sense,” since both aspects of him were part of his life.

(Haley, 1993: 9)

* *

When the seventh month came, he moved to the desert and laid upon the parched land foundations for a temple of healing. Now, it came to pass that he was struck down with sickness, and could no longer walk amongst the people, or raise his voice in exaltation, yet still the crowds flocked to his side to hear him speak. Many who were also ailing and low with pain would be healed or soothed by his words. When at last he was taken from this life his disciples remembered his teachings and brought forth tales of his wisdom to spread amongst the people. And across the land his word grew strong, yeah, even stronger beyond death. And his voice stayed on, as he had foretold, remaining with the people wherever they went.

* *

What is it that is so startling in its absence?

Below the surface, connections drift like forgotten promises.

(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).
The biblical ALF (above), used as an analytic trope (see also Edwards, Ashmore and Potter, 1995), caricatures the way that reverential descriptions of Milton Erickson, the hypnotherapist, clinician and author of academic papers on hypnosis, construct him as extraordinary. Accounts by Erickson’s ‘disciples’ (sic) (Hoffman, 1982), give him a guru-like status, with examples of his wonderful healing powers and the wisdom of his teachings being retold as legendary proof of his greatness. In this chapter I examine the rhetoric of legend building, and the various ways that a single figure in the field of hypnosis can be constructed as a visionary, not only after his death, but also within his own life time. Furthermore, I look at how the description of Erickson as ‘ahead of his time’ can effectively manage the controversial reputation of hypnosis by working rhetorically to present his work as a legitimate subject for academic audiences, while maintaining the mystique of the subject. The following analysis suggests that Erickson is constructed as legendary through various textual descriptions (such as being a man ahead of his time), and examines how such descriptions manage to deflect potential criticisms. In looking at the proposed difficulty of describing Erickson’s work and the skill needed to emulate him, I suggest that such descriptions make for a delicate balancing act, between attempts to establish theoretical guidelines, and assertions maintaining the mystique of Erickson’s methods.

This mysterious image of the magnetic hypnotist may have been encouraged in Erickson’s own presentation of himself (Haley, 1993), but this is not what descriptions of (for example) his purple clothes focus upon. The various authors, unlike the authors of tales about Mesmer’s dramatic presence in the history of hypnosis, use descriptions of Erickson’s purple clothes to convey his originality and ability to turn any situation into a learning experience, rather than to convey any sense of the theatrical or absurd. In accounts of Erickson his actions are explained in terms of unconscious teachings, with stories about the hypnotist told and retold as illustrations of his expertise.

My own tale of Erickson involves analysing various narratives, such as André Weitzenhoffer’s (1976) account of his breakfast with Erickson, and Erickson’s ‘scratching hogs’ story, as illustrations of the ways that textual descriptions construct Erickson’s behaviour as amazing and skilful (with this textual description constructing Erickson’s legendary importance as textually constituted). In my analysis of one of
Erickson’s own ‘teaching tales’ (Rosen, 1982), ‘scratching hogs’ gets changed from a symbol of the wisdom of trusting one’s unconscious, to the work of a door to door salesman, and a kind of metaphoric back scratching performed by the speaker/writer upon the listener/reader. This leaves me, however, with the slippery, reflexive problem of suggesting (at the risk of losing the sympathy of my audience by intimating their resemblance to swine) that the readers of this chapter might also be about to be subjected to a bit of hog scratching. As with back scratching, perhaps the best bet will be, in the words of Erickson, to leave your audience ‘wishing for more’ (Erickson, Rossi & Rossi, 1976: 206).

**An atheoretical practice**

The work of Milton H. Erickson (1901-1980) has been described as highly influential among practising clinicians and hypnotists, with a substantial quantity of texts written both by and about him (Edmonston, 1986; Havens, 1985). However, although Erickson has written many experimental research papers on hypnosis, as well as books on his therapeutic interventions, and his contribution to psychotherapy has, perhaps rather ambitiously, been likened to that of Freud’s (Haley, 1993; Havens, 1985; Zeig, 1980), Erickson is not generally referenced within standard psychology textbooks, nor appears to be widely recognized within the academic field. It would seem that while Erickson’s reputation is great amongst his followers, within academia he becomes, if anything, another small citation.

In the following analysis I suggest ways in which such potential dissonance is dealt with in texts about Erickson’s work. For example, Ernest and Sheila Rossi (Erickson, Rossi & Rossi, 1976: 297), in promoting Erickson’s work, state that he tended to be ‘atheoretical and pragmatic in his approach,’ preferring practice to formulating an overall theory of hypnosis. The authors, therefore, have the dilemma of describing

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1 And yet, curiously or not, this will be the longest chapter in my thesis.
2 Furthermore, Erickson was a fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychopathological Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He also founded the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis in 1957, and the American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis in 1958 (Edmonston, 1986).
3 ‘Ericksonian Societies’ have formed over the years both in Britain and North America, with advocates of his methods calling themselves Ericksonians or Ericksonian practitioners (e.g., Havens & Walters, 1989).
Ericksonian practice with enough consistency for the researcher to investigate, or the practitioners to follow. This is frequently attempted by categorizing Erickson’s therapeutic moves as techniques, with theoretical concepts and principles (e.g., Erickson, Rossi & Rossi, 1976; Havens, 1985; Zeig & Rennick, 1991), and linked with descriptions of Erickson as a wise therapist, and with accounts of his phenomenal success in treating his patients (Erickson & Rossi, 1979, 1989; Haley, 1973). Such descriptions of Erickson are frequently reverential, implying that he was a charismatic figure, influencing many who met him with his teachings (Rosen, 1982). His ‘teaching tales’ (ibid: 25-26), like those of a guru or a prophet, reflect his wisdom (Havens, 1985), and like allegories from the I Ching or tales from the Bible, lend themselves to frequent reinterpretation and multiple understandings. Ericksonians, as his ‘disciples’ and ‘pilgrims’ (Hoffman, 1982: 13-14), have offered innumerable ‘interpretations’ of Erickson’s work, and it is such interpretations which construct and reinforce the hypnotist as a great man.

In an introductory description of Erickson (below), the notion that he is still ahead of his time conveys the genius of the man, while at the same time attending to possible criticisms that this is not a widely recognized fact. Jay Haley’s (1973) introduction, with the word ‘still’ in ‘still ahead of his time’, contains within it not only a kind of inescapable TWOD, or ‘truth will out device’ (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984), but is also indexical of the position of the author (Haley) as situated alongside Erickson, both ahead of their times.

Nigel Gilbert and Michael Mulkay (1984) devised the TWOD from their studies of scientists’ discourse, as a way of describing, for example, how scientists deal with the potential incompatibility of accounting for the empirical truth of their practice in the face of opposition from other scientists.† The TWOD contained within Haley’s introduction

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4 Corydon Hammond (1988: 173) reflects the perplexity of trying to imitate or explain Erickson’s therapeutic techniques, in his rather rambling and confused address on the real Milton Erickson. “Who was the real Milton Erickson?” Was he a mystic storyteller of sufì-like tales, so indirect that no one could figure out what they meant? Was he a man who spoke in confusional [sic] riddles and constantly communicated on four levels simultaneously? Was he a symbolic therapist who sent everyone to hike Squaw Peak, and expected them to get more than just tired? Was he a guru who just went into somnambulistic trances and let his unconscious conduct therapy?

5 In their analysis, Gilbert and Mulkay (1984: 92) demonstrate how the TWOD is employed to resolve any ‘interpretative difficulties arising from the speaker’s use of contingent as well as an empiricist repertoire.’ The empiricist repertoire ‘portrays scientists’ actions and beliefs as following unproblematically and inescapably from the empirical characteristics of an impersonal natural world’ (ibid: 56), whereas the contingent repertoire, used in informal talk,
of Erickson as a man still ahead of his time, rhetorically supports the author’s authority, anticipating and defusing any potential disagreement, with the implicit resolution of all disputes on the value of Erickson’s work. The truth of his contribution to hypnosis will be known in time. The use of a TWOD, in this case, also indexically positions Haley as the man who promoted Erickson as still ahead of his time. Haley is thus an important figure himself in the claim, presenting the facts of what will be — what will come to pass.

**Ghosts from the future**

Yes: women and men who are ahead of their time.
They alone can lead the present into the future.
They are ghosts from the future.
(Shaw, 1973: 668)


**Introduction: A Man Still Ahead of His Time**

and goes on to describe Erickson in these terms

For every issue of the orthodox therapy of his time,
Erickson held an opposing view.
He used hypnosis when that was not done,
he did brief therapy when the only therapy was long-term,
and he gave directives when nondirective therapy was the mode..
..All of these positions by Erickson are becoming accepted in
the field. From being an original and an outsider he has
become central in the field of therapy.
(*ibid: xiii-xiv*)

gives accounts of how views and actions are affected by personal, psychological and social conditions.
The title of Haley’s work, *Jay Haley on Milton H. Erickson* gives an immediate impression that Jay Haley is the authority on his chosen topic. This is not a book written by Ensall Windswap entitled *Jay Haley on Milton H. Erickson*, as a text about Haley’s work on Erickson. It is a book by Haley himself, and is more of a *Jay Haley on Jay Haley on Milton H. Erickson* — that is, a text about Haley’s work on Erickson by Haley himself. Thus we have the expert on the subject displaying his expertise through the selection and presentation of a collection of his own texts on the hypnotist. Not only has Haley aligned himself, in the title, alongside Erickson, but his voice is the authoritative one, which will speak over and above Erickson’s, informing the reader how Erickson is to be read and understood. In describing Erickson as a man still ahead of his time, Haley sets the tone for the text which will follow its heading. This is to be a book about a man who was a leader in his field, whose knowledge about hypnosis had advanced beyond those around him, whether they knew it or not.

*Whether we know it or not, like it or not, connections are being forged in the unconscious of the thesis. And whether she knows it or not, likes it or not, the story of the poet’s poet, the genius’s genius, has been told — by the sociologist who knows better than the poet how she is what she is. And whether we know it or not, like it or not, Haley tells the tale of the hypnotist, as Erickson’s John the Baptist — less holy than he, more holy than thou — as someone who knows better than most what a legendary figure Erickson is.*

*(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).*

*When a person is described as ahead of their time we have the impression of someone whose work has not yet been fully valued for its contribution to the world. Its true worth has still to be known (by all except the proponents of his work, most obviously the author of the prophetic text). This claim makes exceptional the work that is about to be described. It is such details, the description of a man ahead of his time,
and how his (Erickson’s) life history is portrayed in such a way as to illustrate it, which constitute the exceptional person, the ‘ghost from the future’ whose voice, like the therapist he was, will continue to direct us.

As author of the description ‘ahead of his time’ Haley indexes himself as the flag bearer, walking ahead, with Erickson, in a future unbeknown to most of us. It is Haley who will reveal the extent of Erickson’s talent and originality, showing himself to be a true Ericksonian, a person who knows the wisdom of Erickson and as such is very well informed himself (indeed, ahead of his time too, or at least ours).

Alan Gauld (1992:279-80) describes James Braid in a similar way,

[H]is present fame, of course, rests entirely on his publications in the field of hypnotism. These publications were, without doubt, many years ahead of their time, but their prescience is somewhat obscured by their resolutely pedestrian style.

with Gauld being able to inform the reader of the obvious — as we should all know, of course, Braid’s fame was due to his published work (unlike Mesmer whose present fame seems to have arisen from stories of his peculiar practice). However, that these publications, as displays of original thinking, were many years ahead of their time, is more difficult to recognize, since Braid’s style was so unimaginative. By describing the work as prescient, Gauld shows that he has read this unimaginative writing and despite its difficulty (not because it was beyond Gauld’s intellectual capabilities, but because it was so dull!) he could see that this was a work that was ahead of its time. Thus we have, in his description of Braid’s work, an index of Gauld’s own scholarly capabilities, and his worth as an expert on the topic he writes about. He has an intellectual skill which others may lack, an ability to see beyond the style which somewhat obscured, for others who have read it, the content.

It is interesting that, despite Gauld’s ability to recognize Braid’s work as ahead of its time, he does not see Erickson with the same clarifying gaze. Instead he collects Erickson together with others, dealt with as ‘(say)’ (below).
and though I do not wish to belittle such important contributions as those of (say) Hull, Erickson, Sutcliffe, Pattie, R.W. White, Weitzenhoffer, and Eysenck and Furneaux, I shall not deal with them here.

(Gauld, 1992: 579)

By claiming that he does not wish to belittle the work of Erickson (etc.), Gauld belittles it. This he does with the dismissive ‘(say)’, showing Erickson to be just another contributor in the field of hypnosis — someone whose work does not merit the same attention given to Braid (even in such a weighty tome, a comprehensive survey [see chapter five] of 740+ pages). These contributors are succinctly dealt with within the description ‘I shall not deal with them here.’

Such possible neglect of the innovative work of Erickson is managed by Haley, in his use of ‘still’ as a measure of time which embraces the present, the moment of reading.

Introduction: A Man Still Ahead of His Time

Gauld, from Haley’s perspective, would be one of those people not yet to have recognized the value of Erickson’s contribution to hypnosis, being one of the less informed, whereas Haley, as an authority on his subject, is able to inform others on the truth of Erickson’s worth. Furthermore, Haley is in some respects more informed on Erickson’s worth as a hypnotist than Erickson himself.

After introducing Erickson as still ahead of his time, Haley illustrates this with examples (see above) of his originality. Erickson held views opposed to orthodox therapy, and did things with therapy which were generally not practised at that time (note the lovely, persuasively poetic style of his three part listing [Atkinson, 1984]).

He used hypnosis when that was not done,
he did brief therapy when the only therapy was long-term,
and he gave directives when nondirective therapy was the mode.

(ibid: xiii)
What was not general practice, when Erickson began his innovative therapy, is now becoming accepted, according to Haley, and from being an outsider, his work has become central to the field of therapy. In declaring Erickson’s work now to be central, having already described him as still ahead of his time, Haley implies that there is yet more to be learned. Despite all that has been written previously on Erickson, it is Haley’s text which will bring us up to date. Those that remain unconvinced, after reading Haley’s work, are the ones who still have not realized Erickson’s true worth.  

The construction of Erickson as central within the field of therapy, and yet still ahead of his time, deals by implication with Erickson’s absence from standard textbooks. If Erickson is not yet recognized it is because other texts are not as up to date, or as informed, as Haley’s. In the examples below, attempts to define Ericksonian therapy construct hypnosis as a particular state, in which effective unconscious learning can take place. Descriptions of the skill required to evoke such therapeutic interventions not only construct Erickson as a genius, but also the authors as experts on his work, able to recognize Erickson’s therapeutic techniques, understand them, and make them available for others.

**Ericksonian therapy**

Literature, both about and by Erickson is frequently concerned with explaining what Erickson was doing in his practice, and why he was doing what he was doing (e.g., Bandler & Grinder, 1975; Erickson, 1980; Gilligan, 1987; Haley, 1973, 1993; Zeig, 1982), in an attempt to define a method that others can reproduce. Embodied within such texts is the underlying notion that

- Erickson’s techniques are difficult to define,

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6 At the risk of being read as presumptuous and bumptious the same can be applied to a reading of this thesis. If you, as reader of this work, don’t go along with what I’m saying, then perhaps it is because this thesis is ahead of its time. To declare it as such extends it towards a future when a thesis reflexively employing various textual devices (such as poetics) will be as commonplace and acceptable as, for example, one employing statistics and pie charts as evidence of the researcher’s empirical/aesthetic purchase.

7 Ericksonian therapy emphasises the therapeutic benefits of unconscious learning. For example, Erickson states that ‘[o]ne of the greatest advantages of hypnotherapy lies in the opportunity to work independently with the unconscious without being hampered by the reluctance, or sometimes actual inability, of the conscious mind to accept therapeutic gains.’ (Erickson, 1980: 40)
but

- his work offers such an important contribution to the field of hypnosis and therapy that extensive descriptions and explanations are necessary.

It may, at first glance, seem a thorny problem, as the various texts wrestle with the confusion of trying to capture the essence of an elusive Erickson. However, it is this very difficulty of defining Erickson, and the display of such a struggle which contributes to the construction of him as legendary. An analysis of the descriptions (below) of Erickson's techniques suggests that the notion of skill required to practise Ericksonian hypnosis works rhetorically to constitute Erickson as the great man of hypnosis. Descriptions of 'unconscious learning' work (as we shall see, perhaps tenuously), to position his therapeutic techniques within a broader academic field of learning (e.g., the experimental science of behaviour, as it was then), and the unconscious (Freudian theory).

In summarizing the objectives of *Hypnotic Realities* Erickson, Rossi and Rossi (1976) state that they aim to present Erickson's work in such a way as to allow it to be tested and used by other clinicians and researchers.

Because Erickson's approaches presuppose a certain amount of clinical skill, a major goal of this volume has been to carefully delineate exactly how Erickson goes about his work, the observations and inferences he makes, and the hypotheses he tests. Any fair evaluation of his approaches requires that the clinician and researcher acquire some of Erickson's hypnotherapeutic skills. To facilitate this process of skill acquisition, we have outlined the types of study and exercises that other workers might well pursue to further their clinical practice and research in hypnosis.

*(ibid: 297)*

The authors state that, in order to make a fair evaluation of Erickson's work, clinicians and researchers need to acquire some of the therapeutic skills under investigation. In other words, in order to appreciate the effectiveness of such a method, the researcher
needs to join the culture, 'go native'. This reflects a classic dilemma within
anthropology, and other areas of research, over 'etic' versus 'emic' (Pike, 1954. See also
Edwards, in press) analyses, being an objective outsider versus a quasi cultural member
(Geertz, 1973, 1983). The 'Catch 22' of such a situation is that a researcher cannot
criticize an area from the outside, since her criticism may be countered with the
argument that she simply did not understand what was really going on, and in order to
do so must become (sympathetically) initiated into the practice. This standard argument
is used, for example in religious cults, where the outsider cannot criticize what he has not
experienced, or within psychoanalysis, where the aspiring practitioner is required to
undergo intensive psychoanalysis himself before becoming an analyst. It is also an
argument that has been directed at SSK, in which sociologists cannot adequately
examine science since only scientists can truly understand its practice.\(^8\) Thus, with
Ericksonian therapy the clinician or researcher cannot fairly evaluate its contribution to
psychotherapy until she has learned at least some of the techniques. This argument can
also be applied to the academic texts which have not yet recognized the value of
Erickson's work — to do so requires a skill and knowledge that the authors of such texts
have not acquired. Rhetorically the most persuasive of positions would be to be critical
from the 'inside',\(^9\) and the above invitation seems to offer an opportunity for such 'fair
evaluation.' However, any critical analysis of Erickson's work can also be countered
with the criticism that the researcher had not yet learned the techniques \textit{properly}.\(^10\)

The status of \textit{Hypnotic Realities}, as a text which aims to teach the teachings of
Erickson, assumes not only the skill of the practitioner, but also reflects the skill of the
authors in being able to perform such a feat. Constructed within the description of what

\(^8\) This argument was also part of a heated verbal exchange (and subsequent letters to the TLS) at
the British Association for the Advancement of Science in September 1994, in which Lewis
Wolpert vehemently attacked SSK and relativism (in the persona of Harry Collins) on these
very grounds.

\(^9\) By being critical from \textit{inside} her discipline, the researcher/speaker/scientist ensures a kind of
'stake inoculation' (Potter, 1996), countering potential criticisms that she is \textit{predisposed} to look
for that which she is claiming to have discovered, and thus strengthening her case as someone

\(^10\) My own analysis could be accused of reflecting a \textit{misunderstanding} of the works of proponents
of Erickson. If, instead of 'deconstructing' constructions of Erickson, I do a different kind of
analysis and describe the intricate details of his therapeutic interventions, as if such
interventions existed to be described in this way, I might offer a fair evaluation of his work.
However, as someone trained in 'Ericksonian techniques' (which indeed I am!) and thus an
insider, I can both legitimately claim status as a fair evaluator, and also suggest that 'fair
evaluation,' for the purpose of this thesis, remains a rhetorical accomplishment.
the clinician or researcher needs to be able to do in order to fairly evaluate Erickson’s work is an assumption of the value and legitimacy of Erickson’s work. The factual description that ‘because Erickson’s approaches presuppose a certain amount of clinical skill’ (Erickson et al, 1976: 297) is a claim that Erickson’s fame precedes the text, with the effectiveness of his techniques already beyond question. The task of the student of this approach is to emulate Erickson, not to doubt its validity. In stating that a major goal of the book is to ‘carefully delineate exactly how Erickson goes about his work, the observations and inferences he makes, and the hypotheses he tests’ (ibid), the authors display the way that they have made Erickson’s work available for analysis and academic investigation. This rhetorically reinforces their text as the one that has succeeded in emulating Erickson’s procedures exactly, and shows it therefore to be a trustworthy guide on how to acquire Ericksonian skills. It also displays Erickson as the scientist, observing, inferring and testing his hypotheses, and as such reinforces his credibility as a practitioner of hypnosis, with his work carefully tested before becoming available for dissemination.

As suggested above, a description of skill works rhetorically to support the credibility of an Ericksonian perspective, reinforcing Milton Erickson as a great therapist, and displaying the authors as experts able, through their own skilful manipulations, to ‘carefully delineate’ an ‘atheoretical and pragmatic approach’ (ibid).

**Latent learning**

Despite a description of Erickson’s work as ‘atheoretical,’ there is a basic assumption within his practice of the existence of an unconscious, with a crucial difference between unconscious and conscious learning, and unconscious communication utilized by the Ericksonian therapist in order to effect therapeutic change.

In the example below, the template used to explain Erickson’s work is a model of unconscious learning, which shifts uneasily between a behavioural theory of ‘latent learning’ and a Freudian model of the unconscious. Fundamental to Erickson’s approach is a recognition of the importance of utilizing the unconscious within therapeutic learning, and part of the skill of being an Ericksonian practitioner involves acquiring techniques for doing this.
In the introduction to *Hypnotic Realities* the authors (ibid: 149) link ‘latent learning’ with an Ericksonian notion of ‘learning without awareness’ (ibid) as a way of supporting a description of proper hypnosis as opposed to ‘what passes for hypnosis’ (ibid).

In experimental psychology it has been demonstrated that learning can indeed take place without awareness (e.g., the so-called latent learning). Such learning without awareness is Erickson’s preferred way of working with patients in trance. Erickson has commented on the fact that what passes for hypnosis in the experimental literature, where a short induction of a few minutes’ duration is followed by standardized suggestions (that do not take into account or meaningfully utilize patients’ individual differences), is actually a mixture wherein the patient uses conscious volition mixed with unconscious learning. This reliance on conscious volition and direction is the mark of an inadequately trained hypnotic subject. (ibid: 149)

Despite Erickson’s vehement public rejection of the work of his academic tutor, Clark L. Hull (Gravitz 1991; Havens, 1985), and the way that Hull, from his behaviourist perspective, attempted to standardize hypnosis, with little time for a notion of ‘inner processes’ (Havens, 1985), the authors of *Hypnotic Realities* make a direct link between Erickson’s ‘learning without awareness’ and the ‘conditioning’ phenomenon that Hull called ‘latent learning.’ Rather than viewing the above extract as signalling an unexpected reconciliation between warring factions, an analysis of this (perhaps peculiarly incongruous) link offers a suggested diagnosis of unconscious (symptomatic) rhetoric.

In a single reference to experimental psychology, Erickson, Rossi & Rossi draw on a complexity of rhetorical resources. An analysis of their text brings to the surface (to use a ‘depth’ metaphor) several of the connections that the authors forge in their reference to latent learning. First the credibility of learning theory is constituted in its
positioning within experimental psychology as an objective science, in which ‘laws’ of
behaviour are inferred from observable phenomena.

‘Latent learning’, a term used by stimulus-response conditioning theorists,
proposed that learning could take place within a subject (rat) without direct teaching
(reinforcement), in what were called ‘latent-learning experiments’ performed on rats in
mazes (e.g., Tolman, 1948). Rats that were not ‘reinforced’ with food were apparently
learning the complex map of the maze in the same way as rats that were reinforced, but
they did not ‘show’ that learning until food was presented to them. For behaviourists
this notion, that learning was happening when it could not be observed, was a
troublesome one, requiring a satisfactory (behaviourist) explanation for what was
happening in the rats. According to ‘drive reduction’ theorists, such as Hull, rats were
reinforced by having their ‘curiosity drive’ reduced (satisfied), which took the place of
food reinforcement. This model required the theoretical invention of mediated stimulus-
response connections to explain a reinforcing event that the observer could not see, with
an internal process, invisible to the observer, termed ‘latent learning.’ It should be noted
that ‘latent’ learning, here, is a matter of the experimenter not being able to observe or
measure the reinforcement that theoretically ought to be there. It had nothing to do with
rat’s ‘awareness,’ given that awareness had no theoretical role to play in any kind of
behavioural learning, including the effect of food. Indeed, ‘curiosity reduction’ sounds a
lot more ‘aware’ than the indirect effects of eating food!

*

This link between latency and consciousness is clearly linguistic, and ironically
enough, an unconscious one. The authors’ move may be rather clumsy, as far as
theory is concerned, but linguistically it tells a tale of unconscious wisdom. In
unconsciously confusing Learning Theory’s ‘latent’ with Freudian ‘latency’ Erickson et
al. chose the most apt description for learning without awareness. What the observer
cannot see and labels ‘latent’, as a curiosity drive reduced by invisible reinforcement,

11 ‘The use of language is so automatic that the opportunity never arises for the fundamental
notions to emerge to consciousness’ (Boas, 1966: 64). Benjamin Whorf (1956), influenced by
the work of Franz Boas, proposes that the way we think is (unconsciously, without our realizing
it) determined by our language.
and what Freud (1909b) did not see, and labelled the ‘latency period’ in which childhood sexuality gets driven into the unconscious, linguistically becomes one and the same thing. And, of course, Freudian latency leads us far more directly to the unconscious, and to hypnosis, than behaviouristic ‘drive reduction’ ever could. Given that Whorf’s thesis concerned unconscious language habits, Whorf is the missing link, one of the forgotten promises, whose thesis reveals the latent rhetoric of Erickson et al’s unconscious use of the term ‘latency,’ with regard to Erickson’s (here) suppressed hostility and rejection of his (father figure) mentor, Hull.

(Ah, the sweet joy of raising to consciousness these hidden depths of meaning and rhetoric — the linguistic, rhetorical unconscious!)

(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).

*  

For Erickson, ‘learning without awareness,’ in which hypnosis enables the hypnotist to communicate with the patient’s unconscious mind, brings about therapeutic change without the need for the patient’s conscious awareness or explicit suggestions. In the above example the authors make a tenuous link with learning theory that is difficult to sustain theoretically, since behaviourism has no use for conceptions of the unconscious, and Ericksonian hypnotherapy has nothing to do with ‘reinforcement schedules.’ Since Erickson, Rossi and Rossi (1976) do not attempt to strengthen or maintain (reinforce) this link with learning theory, we can ask what this single reference to ‘latent learning’ does, rhetorically, at this point in the authors’ description of Erickson’s work.

In experimental psychology it has been demonstrated that learning can indeed take place without awareness (e.g., the so-called latent learning). Such learning without awareness...

(1bid: 149)

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12 Perhaps my own linking here is part of my unconscious wisdom about what was really going on in the authors’ text. (On the other hand, perhaps it is part of a drive reduction to produce a credible sort of Ph.D. thesis)...
Ericksonian 'learning without awareness' is given credibility in various ways in the above sentence. In this extract 'the so-called latent learning' becomes evidence for learning without awareness, with 'e.g.,' showing it to be one example of the ways in which experimental psychology has demonstrated the existence of learning without awareness. The 'e.g.,' and 'the so-called' diminish the solidity of latent learning as part of a theoretical approach, allowing an emphasis on learning without awareness, as though latent learning were part of a grander theory of learning without awareness. 'So-called' distances latent learning as something that the authors need not examine, while retaining it as proof, as does 'it has been demonstrated' and 'indeed' (ibid), that learning without awareness is a real phenomenon. Experimental psychology is the warrant which enables the authors to assert that such learning indeed takes place. The authors’ reference to this discipline implies that the topic under examination is grounded in experimentally tested findings, a far cry indeed from mere mesmerism. And if any discipline should know the truth about 'latent learning' it is experimental psychology.

In a single sentence the authors connect Ericksonian hypnosis with a discipline that conducts its investigations through rigorous methods of testing and truth finding — the very discipline whose modern exponents (Spanos, Wagstaff), like their predecessors (Hull, Skinner), would have nothing to do with mysterious mental states and entities such as hypnosis and the unconscious. What then follows is a description of what passes for hypnosis, and what it really is, and in doing so the authors now suggest that, in matters of trance induction, traditional experimental methods are unsatisfactory and ill informed.

Erickson has commented on the fact that what passes for hypnosis in the experimental literature, where a short induction of a few minutes’ duration is followed by standardized suggestions (that do not take into account or meaningfully utilize patients’ individual differences), is actually a mixture wherein the patient uses conscious volition mixed with unconscious learning. This reliance on conscious volition and direction is the mark of an inadequately trained hypnotic subject. (ibid: 149)
This damning description, in outlining the inadequacy of ‘standardized suggestions,’ sets up a straw person that is easy to rebut, and then rebuts it. The rhetoric of this move, in a text which aims to show clinicians and researchers exactly how Ericksonian therapy works in order for them to make a fair evaluation of the approach, serves to bolster Ericksonian hypnosis as a genuine and effective treatment, and the authors themselves as the authority on this work. This therapy, as the authors have implied, requires a specialized knowledge in order for it to be used effectively, and therefore evaluated fairly, and while experimental psychology may have demonstrated empirically and theoretically that learning without awareness happens, it has not adequately grasped the therapeutic practice of trance inductions. Thus the authors are able to use reference to experimental psychology to both legitimate an Ericksonian perspective, and to reveal its own inadequacies of practice. The man ahead of his time is still ahead of his time.

Despite the large quantity of academic, experimental papers that Erickson wrote on hypnosis (such as hypnotic deafness, trance depth, ideomotor responses, hallucinations in colour vision...), it is claimed that he was an atheoretical practitioner rather than an academic theorist. His large following of devotees signals perhaps his cult-like status more acutely than his academic success, and in works about Milton Erickson writers frequently attend to a possible credibility gap in his theorising, and in the status of ‘hypnosis,’ by emphasizing his strength as a practitioner, his elusive genius, his likeable, trustworthy humility, his wisdom, and his power to overcome difficulties in his own life.

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13 However, in a critique of Erickson’s work Theodore Barber (1972: 179) states that Erickson made inferences of ‘trance’ from the subject’s responsiveness to test suggestions: ‘[t]o maintain the logic of the trance paradigm, Erickson was compelled to contend that some subjects are in a deep hypnotic trance even when they do not think they are in trance, are judged by psychologists and psychiatrists as being in a normal waking state, and are even judged by Erickson himself as being “seemingly awake and functioning... in a manner similar to that of a nonhypnotized person operating at the waking level” (Erickson, 1967a, p.13)” (see also Wagstaff, 1981).
Yea, and those who saw what he had done believed in him, and followed him.

* 

In the following example, various descriptions of Erickson’s fondness for wearing purple are handled delicately, as a way of showing the man to be original and powerful without being an oddity. Stories about Erickson often include his preference for purple clothing. However, unlike descriptions of Mesmer, in which purple clothes were evidence of his showmanship and dubious credibility, descriptions of Erickson in purple reinforce his originality and make a virtue out of his ‘disability.’ For those who had never met Erickson, it is interesting that out of the many possible descriptions they could have heard, about the kind of person he was, one that dominates is a description of his purple clothes.

The colour purple

Apart from an abundance of the color purple, I was not sure what to expect when I arrived.

(Van Dyck, 1980: x)

Richard Van Dyck describes his first meeting with Erickson, and how the one thing he was sure about, before he met the hypnotist, was that the man would be surrounded by purple. Van Dyck had either heard a quantity of contradictory tales about Erickson, and thus wasn’t sure what the truth was about him, or had heard very few and barely informative stories. This signals that there is something unusual about the man. What is made of this idiosyncrasy depends on what follows next. For Van Dyck it was a rather extraordinary ordinariness, a description of mundane virtues which are worth mentioning only with regard to the alternatives they refute — that Erickson was an important person, complex, and possibly aloof.

What struck me most in the initial meeting with him was his simplicity, friendly interest, and total lack of self-importance.

(ibid:x)

155
The danger that Erickson might be viewed as bit of a showman, dressed up in purple, is avoided in an immediate description of his ‘total lack of self-importance.’ We get an impression, from Van Dyck’s first meeting, of Erickson’s striking humility and friendliness, with any suspicion (by the discerning reader) of the hypnotist’s possible eccentricity or self-aggrandizement being appeased. The plausibility of Van Dyck’s description, in a foreword to a book on Erickson, is as a personal account — we can believe that Erickson was a nice and fairly unassuming person because Van Dyck was actually there. Erickson’s simplicity and lack of self-importance, mentioned as if unexpected, reminds us of his existing reputation, and helps to constitute him as important and extraordinary. Furthermore, Erickson’s reputation as someone who dresses in purple precedes him, signalling that he is someone who is talked about, with details of his personal style contributing to his legendary status.

Aside from an intense curiosity and a general reluctance simply to accept the beliefs and superstitions of his rural community, Erickson’s world was different from others for physiological reasons as well. For example, he had an unusual form of color blindness that enabled him to perceive and enjoy the color purple but little else. As a result, he surrounded himself with this color in later life and eventually became quite interested in the hypnotic induction of color blindness.

(Havens, 1985: xii)

In the above extract colour blindness explains, without question, Erickson’s fondness for purple. It fits neatly into a description of how even Erickson’s world was different from others, as another bit of evidence of the originality of the hypnotist (even his colour blindness was unusual). Whereas Erickson could enjoy the colour purple, there was ‘little else’ (ibid) in the way of colours that he could enjoy. This description

14 It is strange that if Erickson could see only one colour, he could enjoy it. Havens does not explore this, nor whether Erickson could differentiate between varying shades of purple — could he enjoy, for example, only reddish purple, or bluish purple? Could he tell the difference between shades of lilac and indigo? An Ericksonian therapist, attempting to explore this.
of Erickson in purple bears little resemblance to descriptions of Mesmer’s robes. It is not suggested, in any of the histories of hypnosis referenced, that Mesmer might have worn purple because he was colour blind and could only enjoy that particular colour. Instead it was used as evidence to undermine his credibility as a scientist.

Being colour blind makes wearing purple more a feature of the colour blindness, less a part of the wearer’s agency or peculiar preferences, and is thus more concerned with how the colour blind person deals with it as a disability. At the same time, the description of the colour blindness as a particular sort of colour blindness singles Erickson out as different — the sort of person who isn’t afflicted with common or garden red/green colour blindness, but a more unusual form. Furthermore, the example of color blindness can support descriptions of Erickson as able to turn a potential handicap into a virtue, by exploring the induction of colour blindness through hypnosis.

Dr. Erickson is also color blind, and this too became an asset when he experimented with producing color blindness with hypnosis.15

(Haley, 1993:3)

In Van Dyck’s foreword there was a brief description of a man who surrounded himself with purple. Both Havens’s (1985) and Haley’s (1993) descriptions, of a man who overcame the disadvantage of colour blindness, and used it as an asset in his work, construct a particular image of the hypnotist, using colour blindness as supporting evidence of Erickson’s special qualities. Zeig (1980: xx) uses a description (below) of the colour purple to expand upon his presentation of Erickson as a powerful figure who could make the best of physical disabilities against difficult odds.

Erickson surmounted a considerable number of health problems throughout his adult life. He was confined to a wheelchair since 1967 from the residuals of anterior

15 ‘disorder’ might begin by asking the patient to define all of the sorts of purples he could recognize in an attempt to expand the perceived boundaries of ‘blindness’. Erickson’s colour blindness was claimed to be an asset in his experimentation of inducing colour blindness in subjects, apparently because it avoided experimenter bias (Haley, 1993).
poliomyelitis. Erickson explained that he thought that poliomyelitis was the best teacher he had ever had about human behavior and its potentials. Erickson had a color-vision deficiency, but he appreciated the color purple and enjoyed having it around him and receiving special gifts in that color.

(ibid: xx)

In the same description of Erickson ‘surmounting a considerable number of health problems’ (including polio), Zeig discusses the hypnotist’s ‘color-vision deficiency.’ This is an image of a brave and extraordinary man, who can be stricken with polio, confined to a wheelchair, and yet able to redefine the disease in terms of teachings about human potential. What this suggests is that Erickson, as an authority on therapeutic transformations, practised what he preached. The rhetoric of this reflects upon Zeig’s work on Erickson, as a book worth reading about a legendary figure, since the author’s discussion suggests a close knowledge of Erickson’s life and his personal anecdotes, with Erickson offering Zeig an intimate disclosure on his life in a wheelchair, which Zeig is able to pass on to the reader. Following on from polio, in the list of Erickson’s considerable number of health problems, is the hypnotist’s ‘color-vision deficiency.’ This rather more formalized version of ‘colour-blindness’ is consistent with Zeig’s description of polio as ‘the residuals of anterior poliomyelitis.’ The technical definitions remind the reader of the seriousness of the disabilities that Erickson overcame, and legitimizes the wearing of purple, as a side effect of his medical problems. They also index the writer, Zeig, as possessing accurate medical knowledge — these are veridical-sounding, technical descriptions, not hearsay folk categories.

For anyone who might have started to read the description of Erickson with the misconception that his fondness for purple was because he was a bit of a showman, a bit of a charlatan, Zeig’s story sets the record straight. Erickson had a deficiency, but despite this, could enjoy one colour, and this he was surrounded with. The description of receiving gifts of purple things, and having purple around him, makes Erickson’s fondness for the colour a little less intentional and agentive, and the specialness of the special gifts shows how admirers contributed, in a thoughtful way, to his purple environment.
The one color he can enjoy is purple. Although it might not always be an appropriate color, he manages to surround himself with it whenever he can. He wears purple ties and sports shirts, his pajamas are purple, and the bathroom in his house has purple walls.

(Haley, 1993:3).

Haley’s description, on the other hand, suggests a man actively surrounding himself with purple things. Haley gives details of Erickson’s purple clothes, not only his ties and his sports shirts, but also displays an intimate knowledge of Erickson’s personal and domestic life, such as the colour of his pyjamas and bathroom walls. The image of Erickson ‘managing’ to surround himself with purple is an endearing one, constituted in Haley’s choice of a paternalistic voice, and by the evidence offered of Erickson’s eccentricity concerning the colour. In discussing the appropriateness of purple, Haley adopts a paternal tone, showing that he, as author, and as someone who has inside information on Erickson’s personal life, is well aware that being surrounded by the colour purple might be misinterpreted as weird. However, Haley’s description of Erickson is not of a strange man but rather of a very human person with a whimsy for purple things. ‘Manages’ gives us a gently humorous impression of someone who deliberately sets out to surround himself in purple, in a concerted way, aware of the eccentricity of it. ‘Whenever he can’ (ibid: 3), contributes to this image of wilfulness, an errant figure with such an idiosyncratic pleasure for purple things, that he will surround himself with them at all opportunities. However, Erickson’s pleasure in purple, with its safely physiological cause, offers a nice, friendly image to illustrate nonconformity and evidence of the man’s originality.

Haley presents Erickson as approachable and human, despite his greatness. The image of the legend amongst therapists in his purple pyjamas is endearing. It also signals the closeness that Haley had to the Erickson family. Haley had information about Erickson that not many people might have, such as the colour of his bathroom walls and, particularly, the colour of his pyjamas. This reinforces Haley’s credibility as an authority on the real Erickson, not just on his public persona.
While Milton Erickson was almost certain to have been aware of the impact his purple clothes would have had on others, (especially amongst their purple surroundings), and the image of himself that this would have conveyed, Haley’s description of his pyjamas shows that this was not just a public performance (perhaps Mesmer wore purple night attire too). Erickson really was so genuinely fond of purple that even his pyjamas, the nightwear that few people ever get to see, were purple.

An analysis of the above quotations highlights the rhetoric of stories of Erickson in purple, and how they work to convey an impression of his originality, his strength of character, and his ability to overcome disabilities. As with Mesmer, we can see the ways in which wearing purple constitutes a particular kind of hypnotist within the author’s discourse. Erickson’s fondness for purple is conveyed as an example of his legendary qualities, whereas descriptions of Mesmer’s purple ‘robes’ constitute him as a charlatan. Furthermore, descriptions of purple signal the author’s credibility as an expert on Milton Erickson, as someone with inside information on the man ahead of his time.

*  

What is it that has not yet been said? There is a rhetorical absence of links in all of this talk of purple — the authors’ unconscious connections, like dogs barking in the night, conspicuous by their silence. The therapeutic resolve lies in trusting the wisdom of the unconscious and hearing what has been previously repressed in the various texts on Erickson, his hypnotic presence and his purple clothes. Textual therapy unites Mesmer and Erickson, in their fondness for wearing purple, and their legendary status as enchanters. There. It’s done.

(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).

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So far I have attended to textual constructions of Erickson as a major contributor within the field of therapy, as both an academic and clinician whose methods can be

16 "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?" "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time." "The dog did nothing in the night-time." "That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes." (Doyle, 1986: 150)
evaluated objectively, and as a genius whose work is still ahead of its time. Personal accounts (persuasive in their intimacy), such as descriptions of Erickson’s clothes, bring the reader into intimate contact with the man behind the works, and allows us an understanding of what makes the great man so great.

The following analysis looks at the way that ‘inside information’ can also be about the unconscious (and even, by implication, the reader’s unconscious), and how descriptions of Erickson’s voice as omnipresent can be sustained as examples of his therapeutic success. In the extracts below (examples 1 & 2) quotations of Erickson’s hypnotic suggestions construct him as a charismatic figure, offering a familiar cultural image of a hypnotist able to exert influence over the subject, even from a distance.

Rosen (1982:31) elaborates on this quoted suggestion by offering an explanation as to how this could be possible, by using descriptions of hypnotic trance to support a notion that Erickson’s voice really could go with the listener.

**My voice will go with you**

**EXAMPLE 1:7**

And I want you to choose some time in the past when you were a very, very little girl. And my voice will go with you. And my voice will change into that of your parents, your neighbors, your friends, your schoolmates, your playmates, your teachers. And I want you to find yourself sitting in the school room, a little girl feeling happy about something, something that happened a long time ago, that you forgot a long time ago.

— Milton H. Erickson

The above quotation prefaces *My voice will go with you: The teaching tales of Milton H. Erickson* (Rosen, 1982). In this work, the editor, Sidney Rosen, offers a meta-analysis of a collection of Erickson’s therapeutic stories, showing how the therapeutic metaphors within each of the tales are able to effect changes in the unconscious. The book is a collection of success stories about Erickson’s therapeutic
interventions. The authority on how Erickson’s stories worked is given voice not by Erickson, but by Rosen, Erickson’s spokesperson and ‘disciple’ (Hoffman, 1982: 14). The title of this work refers to a favoured hypnotic suggestion of Erickson’s. According to Rosen (1982) this was a phrase often used by Erickson so that he could

keep contact with the patient in trance, regardless of the depth of the patient’s regression, while also serving as a cue to posthypnotic suggestion. These suggestions could include injunctions and points of view, which would then be “heard” (often in Erickson’s voice) as the voice of an introjected parent or superego.

(ibid: 31)

Rosen’s description of the intended effects of Erickson’s suggestion takes for granted trance phenomena such as regression, posthypnotic suggestions, and the influence of the hypnotist over the patient. It also assumes a Freudian model of the unconscious in which a ‘superego’ is a controlling ‘voice’ within. The hypnotist’s voice communicating, not only with but from, the patient’s unconscious as the organizing inner voice of the ‘superego,’ gives an impression of the intimacy of such contact, and the wisdom of the therapist over and above that of the subject. Rosen (ibid: 31), citing Lawrence Kubie (but not referencing any work by him), explains just how a hypnotist’s voice gets to be heard from the ‘inside,’ in trance, since

the distinction between hypnotist and subject is abolished.

The subject then hears the hypnotist’s voice as if it were coming from inside his own head — as his own inner voice.

This was true of Erickson. His voice would become your voice, and his voice would go with you, wherever you were.

This is a nice, simple, matter-of-fact explanation which sounds like logic. The hypnotist’s voice is heard as if it were inside the patient’s head, because, in trance, the
distinction between hypnotist and subject is abolished. This supports the truth of Erickson’s suggestion that his voice really did go with his patients, since the distinction between whose voice it is anyway is abolished in trance. Note that Rosen informs the reader of this truth as if the reader, and the author of those words (Rosen), were also subjects of trance — Erickson’s voice would go with you wherever you were. The importance of Erickson’s suggestion is signalled by the editor’s use of it as a title, and is as such a neat summary of the ‘message’ of Rosen’s book. Erickson’s voice (like a ghost from the future) is with us all, directing or guiding us as we read. This could now extend into the unconscious minds of both the readers and the author of this text (with Erickson’s voice shaping a writing and a reading of this chapter) — if it were not for the meta-voice of Rosen speaking for Erickson. Rosen’s voice has become the one (like the voice of a translator heard through a headset, speaking just after the original speaker) that makes sense of the stories we are offered. It is therefore Rosen’s voice that goes with the reader, over and above that of Erickson’s.

However, I am afraid the twisting, spiralling analyses of ‘voice’ is not quite over yet. My own authorial voice is like that of the hypnotist, ‘revealing’ that which has previously been repressed, and reformulating Rosen’s words into the sort of analysis which ‘shows’ how Erickson gets presented as the wise enchanter. It is my voice the reader hears.

My voice goes with you.

This may extend as if it were a hypnotic suggestion, but what it suggests is not an unusual state of affairs. Rather, talk of hypnosis has made explicit the rhetoric of authoring a text (MacMillan, 1995). By suggesting that my own ‘voice’ as author goes with you, I am highlighting the way in which the author (hypnotist) persuades (hypnotizes) her reader to be guided by her words (suggestions).

In examples one and two (above and below), the portrayal of the hypnotist’s voice accompanying the listener/reader, reinforces the impression of Erickson’s power to influence, persuade, guide and heal those around him. In the quotation below, from an opening sequence in Jeffrey Zeig’s book (1980) entitled Teaching Seminar with Milton H. Erickson, M.D., there is a similar introduction to Erickson through his (reported) words.
EXAMPLE 2:7

And my voice goes everywhere with you, and changes into the voice of your parents, your teachers, your playmates and the voices of the wind and of the rain....

MILTON H. ERICKSON, M.D.

Rosen's (1982) quotation (example 1), like a story, offers characters (a woman who might reflect back to her childhood memories, a hypnotist who suggests she regress), and a plot (a time in the past when something happened, a time in the present when she is regressing). Within the story Erickson has become parental, directing the 'very, very little girl' to feel happy. His influence is the sort of warm and friendly one of an experienced someone who knows what he is doing, and is capable of tending for and nurturing his (fledgling-like) subjects.

In example 2 (Zeig, 1980), without the 'padding' of characters or plot, we have the poetic force of an ever present voice.17 There is an impression of a charismatic person, confident enough of his authority as a hypnotist to offer such an instruction. A voice that goes everywhere with you is a compelling image, implying an omnipresence which will guide the listener throughout her daily life, heard as changed into the voices of those of importance around her, and into the sounds of the elements. This is the essence of Ericksonian hypnosis, in which an 'idea' is implanted within, and works with, the patient's unconscious mind to evolve changes (Zeig, 1991: 281), long after the hypnotist is gone. A voice which changes into (Zeig, 1980) the voice of those of importance around us implies that we will still hear their voices (which of course we will), but through them the therapeutic value of Erickson's suggestions will be heard. This leaves it up to the hearer how much of Erickson's wisdom we choose to recognize in the words of others. Parents, teachers, playmates, all evoke a sense of the familiar, the everyday, but they are also the people most likely to be influential, nurturing us, teaching us, and

17 Evangeline Scribbler's parody of this hypnotic induction, although greatly influenced by an Ericksonian perspective, was rhetorically less elegant. 'My voice goes everywhere with you,' she wrote 'and changes into the voice of your bank manager, your ticket collector on the train, your dentist and the voices of the screech owls and the drains.'
playing games with us. Erickson’s voice, linked with the voices of those who are most important in shaping the way we respond to the world, is as familiar as those closest to us, and it is through this familiar connection that we will hear the teachings of the hypnotist. The description of Erickson’s voice as elemental reinforces the impression that the hearer need never feel alone — even in solitude. Rather than the image of Erickson’s voice heard upon the wind and rain being intrusive, it is a poetic one, positioning Erickson’s voice, ethereal as a ghost from the future, within the therapeutic sounds of the elements.

The rhetoric of this image of the hypnotist, presented as presenting his own voice as omnipresent, assumes and reinforces Erickson’s reputation as a powerful hypnotist — as a person who can make such claims and be taken seriously. The words work to convey the teachings of the great master as those which will guide the pupil on her journey through life. In the speaker’s assumption, that his message is likely to be given credence, is the construction of himself as that kind of person. This claim prepares the way for what is to follow — the text as evidence to support such an impression. In both Rosen’s and Zeig’s opening quotes (examples 1 & 2) the reader is immediately introduced to Erickson as the hypnotist whose voice will go with you (and in Zeig’s example [2], it goes everywhere with you). This signals that the author’s book is about a notable figure, a hypnotist whose therapeutic skills were powerful if not legendary.

Both quotations have been taken out of the context of the immediate trance inductions they appear to have once been part of, and presented as memorable things that Erickson said. In example one it becomes a cameo of a trance induction, retaining the setting and characters, and giving a feeling for the master at his craft. The personal details allow us to experience Erickson, the storyteller, in the act of transporting the

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18 A voice that goes with the listener after the speaker has gone implies the importance of the teachings. The disciples of Jesus still needed direction after their master had been crucified. When Jesus returned from the dead he commanded his disciples to spread the word of God to all nations, ‘teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.’ Matthew 28.11.

19 Zeig (1980: xiv) for example, goes on to inform the reader that Erickson was ‘generally acknowledged as the world’s foremost authority on hypnotherapy and brief strategic psychotherapy. He was one of the most creative, perceptive and ingenious psychotherapeutic personalities of all time.’ According to Zeig, time will reveal Erickson’s work to be of legendary importance (ibid). This claim, like Haley’s (1993), produces Erickson as a man ahead of his time, and positions the author as someone who can predict what history will show — the greatness of Milton Erickson.
listener through time with his tales. The listener becomes the main character in the hypnotist’s plot. This illustration nicely represents Rosen’s own work (see below) on Erickson as the teller of therapeutic tales. Example two gives a more immediate sense of the influence of the hypnotist on his listener, and also, in the ambiguity of the out of context quote, the influence of the hypnotist upon the reader. The quote can be both an example of Erickson’s power to entrance, but it may also be a prophesy. After reading Zeig’s book the reader might find himself transformed (and perhaps this is the wish, the unconscious desire, of all authors?). Both examples are positioned in such a way, at the entrance of the text, to offer an immediate impression of Erickson. The quotation informs the reader of the hypnotist’s qualities in a brief, see-for-yourself way, which the author is then at liberty to support in the work that follows, in his appointed role as a ‘disciple’ of Erickson.

The following analysis looks at how an account of a personal experience with Milton Erickson both attends to the reputation that Erickson had as an extraordinary hypnotist, and produces an account which supports the truth of this reputation.

**Breakfast with Milton**

[A]s the years have gone by, he has grown into a quasi-legendary figure to whom the title of

“Mr. Hypnosis” was once given.

(Weitzenhoffer, 1976:xiii)

In the previous section I showed how Erickson is portrayed as an extraordinary teacher, whose work can live on, in his ‘voice,’ even when the speaker is no longer there. In the following story André Weitzenhoffer (1976) gives a personal account of the extent of Erickson’s influence, in which something as ordinary as breakfast, when taken with the great man, could turn into an incredible experience. What is of analytical interest in the example below is not whether or not hypnosis *really* took place, or whether the story relates another example of expectations and compliance (e.g., Wagstaff, 1981), but rather, how Erickson is constructed as ‘Mr. Hypnosis’ in an account of Weitzenhoffer’s own experience of an indirect trance induction. The context
of this story is as a foreword to *Hypnotic Realities: The induction of clinical hypnosis and forms of indirect suggestion* (Erickson, Rossi & Rossi, 1976), a book which consists of transcriptions of Erickson's trance demonstrations, and accompanying (edited) transcriptions of commentaries about the inductions, as discussed between Ernest Rossi and Milton Erickson.

**EXAMPLE 3:7**

1. I can personally attest to the effectiveness of his non-verbal communications, through an experience I had with Milton Erickson some 15 or 16 years ago.
2. Here I think I should make it clear that, to my knowledge, I have never been hypnotized by him, at least formally.
3. A group of us had met in Philadelphia with Milton, in a special seminar aimed at gaining some understanding of his *modus operandi*.
4. One morning I was alone with him sitting at the breakfast table, facing him somewhat obliquely towards his left.
5. As I recall, I was doing most of the talking.
6. As I talked, partially absorbed in my thoughts, I became vaguely aware, peripherally, of Milton making peculiar repetitious gestures with one of his hands.
7. Momentarily I made nothing of this, then with my awareness increasing, two things happened in very close sequence.
8. My right hand moved out, spontaneous-like, to pick up the coffee pot which was on the table and began to lift it.
9. With this, the realization dawned on me that Milton wanted coffee.
10. At that point, to use the terminology of this work, my "conscious mind" took over the action and I completed the act, while realizing now, that Milton's gesturing had, indeed, clearly spelled out a non-verbal request to have coffee poured into his cup.
11. This sort of thing, as I learned in time, is one of his favourite ways of teaching or answering a question about a related matter.
12. It is also his way of subtly testing an individual's suggestibility or hypnotizability.
13. It is also his way of keeping himself in shape, so to speak.
14. I said towards the beginning of this paragraph, that I had never been "formally" hypnotized by Milton Erickson.
15. True, if by "formal induction," we mean the use of any of the usual classical and semi-classical techniques described over and over in various texts on hypnotism.
16. For reasons that will become clear presently, and
certainly after reading the present work, I am sure that the authors would say
that I had indeed been hypnotized by Milton
at least on that particular occasion.

(Weitzenhoffer, 1976: xiv-xv)

Weitzenhoffer’s anecdote appropriately fits its context, not only as a personal
testimony of the effectiveness of informal trance inductions, but also as an illustration of
the creative skill of the hypnotist the book is about (and co-authored by). André’s
subjective account of breakfast with Milton constructs it as a hypnotic experience, and
serves to warrant his previous description of Erickson as Mr. Hypnosis. Furthermore,
his story of being entranced by the legendary hypnotist has reflected glory to it, both as a
participant who can say he has been hypnotized by the master of trance, and also as an
author of the foreword of a text dedicated to the study of Erickson’s induction
techniques.

The intimacy of the breakfast incident is signalled by the way that Weitzenhoffer
calls Erickson ‘Milton’ (line 5), giving the impression that this is a close and informal
situation, with Weitzenhoffer, on first name terms, and sitting alone with the man
‘obliquely towards his left’ (line 8). The detail of the seating arrangements displays the
vividness of Weitzenhoffer’s memory of the events, and implies an accuracy of recall
(Ashmore, 1993; Edwards & Potter, 1992). In remembering that he did most of the
talking (line 9) Weitzenhoffer implies that any hypnosis that occurred was not as a result
of what Erickson said, but rather, and more amazingly, what he did. Weitzenhoffer,
meanwhile, was occupied with thinking about what he was talking to Erickson about
(line 10). This suggests that he wasn’t alerted to the possibility of being hypnotized, but
was ‘partially absorbed’ (line 10) in the matter of talking. André’s description of how he
noticed only vaguely (line 10) that Milton was making gestures with his hands, reaffirms
that he wasn’t expecting anything unusual to happen. It is interesting to note that
Weitzenhoffer’s description of his state of absorption is very similar to the sort of absent
minded distraction that might be utilized by a hypnotist during an indirect trance
induction.20 As Weitzenhoffer implies, the reality of trance will become clear after

20 As a form of indirect induction the ‘confusion technique’ can be used to evoke trance even
‘when the subject is not even aware that hypnosis is contemplated’ (Erickson, Hershman &
Secter, 1990: 190). This technique involves occupying the subject’s conscious mind in such a
way as to prevent possible resistance to the hypnotist’s suggestions.
reading *Hypnotic Realities* (line 30), with the discussions on inductions throwing light on Weitzenhoffer's experience. The aptness of André's state of absorption, Milton's repetitious gestures (line 11), and the subsequent coffee pouring behaviour as a description of hypnosis will be known, if not in the reading of the foreword, then certainly after reading Erickson's work.

André's description makes sense of Milton's 'peculiar repetitious gestures' as unconscious communication, and something which indirect inductions consist of — otherwise we readers might perhaps begin to speculate that Erickson was listening to music on a personal stereo, and waving his hand in time to the beat, or that he was being bothered by a wasp, with Weitzenhoffer so engrossed in what he was saying that he did not notice the insect, only Erickson's swatting gestures. Or, worse still, Erickson was making that little circular movement of one hand, with the index finger extended, that indicates that the listener thinks that the person who is talking is just going on and on! (More simply, of course, Erickson could have been making nonverbal signals that he needed coffee pouring). What we have, however, is a description of 'hypnosis' in which Weitzenhoffer's story introduces the gestures as something that a hypnotist might do, like mesmeric passes, in order to induce trance.

This story of Milton's peculiar hand gestures is made sense of as unconscious communication, and 'proof' of Erickson's skill as a hypnotist. In descriptions, analysed by Dorothy Smith (1978), of a friend's story of K's behaviour, Smith shows how Angela's accounts offer 'proof' of K's mental illness. In the data, acquired from a student report of an interview with 'Angela', Smith's analytical interest is in how the account is rhetorically organized as a factual warrant of K's 'decline' into mental illness.

**EXAMPLE 4:7**

1. On the first morning, Angela's mother offered to make K's breakfast.
2. K very sweetly said: Oh I don't want to give you any trouble, just any-
3. thing, anything that you have got. So Angela’s mother enumerated the
4. things available and K after much coaxing, and shy smiles, asked for
5. tea and a hard boiled egg. At that time, Angela’s mother's own break-
6. fast was ready on the table, coffee and a soft boiled egg. Angela's
7. mother turned to the stove, to put on an egg, and water for tea, and
8. when she came back to the table, there was K smiling sweetly, eating
the soft-boiled egg and drinking coffee. At the time Angela’s mother thought, well she misunderstood me. But later she noticed that K was unable to put on a teapot cover correctly, she would not reverse its position to make it fit, but would simply keep slamming it down on the pot.

(Smith, 1978: 29-30. Original line set and punctuation.)

An analysis of the ‘working up’ (1978: 28), in Angela’s descriptions of K’s behaviour, and how the stories become evidence of K’s mental decline, suggests the constructed nature of such categories as ‘mental illness.’ For example, K’s repetitious gestures, described as ‘simply keep slamming it down on the pot’ (line 12), in the context of Angela’s story, signals abnormal behaviour, since K does not seem to be aware of the normal instructions for working a teapot lid — that is, if it does not fit then turn it around so that the notch in the lid slips under the rim of the pot (ibid: 46). The ‘would simply keep slamming’ constructs K’s behaviour as repetitive and routine (Edwards, 1994), as K’s usual behaviour rather than a one-off action. Thus, it is Angela’s description which constructs K’s behaviour as persistently not normal. A description of the action as ‘simply slammed it down on the pot,’ would have offered a different range of possible explanations for K’s treatment of the teapot lid.

The slamming of the teapot lid, as proof of K’s strange behaviour, follows a more ambiguous episode when breakfast is negotiated between K and Angela’s mother. K is described as, ‘after much coaxing’ (line 4), asking for tea and a hard boiled egg. However, when Angela’s mother turns back to the stove K starts to eat the soft boiled egg and drink the coffee that Angela’s mother has prepared for herself. Angela’s mother is described as thinking “well she misunderstood me” (line 10). This suggests a rehearsal of the incident, with the story being told and retold, out of K’s hearing, by Angela, Angela’s mother, (and perhaps unmentioned others), and worked up into an understanding of K’s behaviour as symptomatic of one who is mentally ill. An equally possible thought at the breakfast table could have been ‘well I must have misunderstood

[21] In Smith (1978), the layout of the interview was intended to reflect the interviewer’s original punctuation and paragraphing. However, despite retaining the claim that the layout is original the form has been altered in Smith (1990). This highlights, not Smith’s intention to deceive, but the way that textual replications change, like Chinese whispers, with the original ‘form and paragraphing’ (Smith, 1990: 17) being, for the reader of Smith (1990) what she reads and perhaps quotes from that text.
her. ‘ Again, this would have allowed a different description of the incident, and a different reflection upon K’s behaviour.

Smith’s analysis highlights mental illness as a construction, suggesting that it is constituted, not in K’s behaviour, but in Angela’s descriptions of it. Likewise, hypnosis can be seen to be constructed within descriptions, both textual and conversational, of hypnotic histories and personal experiences. For example, Milton’s peculiar gestures are explained as part of hypnosis, as André relates how ‘realization dawned’ (line 16) that Milton wanted coffee, and had been communicating with André’s unconscious mind. The dramatic details which precede this realization support how Weitzenhoffer knew that this was hypnosis.

14 My right hand moved out, spontaneous-like, to pick up
15 the coffee pot which was on the table and began to lift it.
16 With this, the realization dawned on me that Milton wanted coffee.

He tells of how his right hand moved out, ‘spontaneous-like’ (line 14), automatically and without thinking, to pick up the coffee pot. Although the action is described as ‘spontaneous-like’, the intention is described as clear — Weitzenhoffer’s hand moved to pick up the coffee pot, not to wander idly across the table and then, by chance, settle upon the coffee pot and lift it. The unconscious, in this description, clearly had a task to perform, and in observing his own act of performing it Weitzenhoffer consciously realized what was going on. The description constructs the hand as severed, albeit briefly, from consciousness, with Weitzenhoffer calling it ‘my right hand’ (line 14), rather than ‘I’, and creating an impression of distance between the speaker and the movement of one of his limbs. This construction of hypnosis is a familiar one, in which part of the subject’s body responds to the hypnotist’s suggestions without the subject being consciously aware of quite what is happening (e.g., Cheek & LeCron, 1968). It is at this point that Weitzenhoffer realizes that he has been hypnotized.

In his personal anecdote André defines Milton’s gestures and his own response in terms of indirect suggestion, thus constructing a version of hypnosis which supports his earlier description of Erickson as Mr Hypnosis. Erickson’s skill is all the more impressive for the casual way in which he seems to induce trance in this mundane, everyday situation, over breakfast and without saying a word. As Weitzenhoffer
explains, this kind of thing is usual for Erickson who will induce hypnosis, not because he wants people to pour his coffee for him, but because

1:- It is one of his favourite ways of teaching, or answering a question on a related subject.

2:- It is his way of subtly testing the subject’s suggestibility.

3:- It is his way of keeping in shape.

(lines 21-24)

The incident of coffee pouring becomes proof of Erickson’s legendary skill, in which Weitzenhoffer is hypnotized by the master, who despite (or because of ) his expertise, continues to practise his techniques and to teach his subjects, through an (assumed) model of hypnosis as unconscious communication.

I have suggested that Erickson as Mr. Hypnosis is constituted within the telling of the tale, with the remarkableness of the incident resting on Weitzenhoffer’s description of it as such. As with the story of K as mentally ill, Weitzenhoffer as hypnotized, is constructed in the description, not in the events themselves. Erickson, as Mr Hypnosis, is both assumed and reinforced, in the foreword of a book co-authored by Erickson, which goes on to discuss the value of an Ericksonian method of inducing trance and utilizing a subject’s ability for unconscious learning.

The role of the foreword writer is generally to praise the author of the book it is prefacing, and frequently assumes that the author of the foreword has a certain insight into the work of the author of the main text. What goes on, therefore, in forewords is perhaps a bit of textual hog scratching (as I shall explain below). In the following example, ‘scratching hogs,’ the metaphor assumed by the authors to illustrate unconscious wisdom, is used in my own analysis as a tool for deconstructing the rhetoric of the foreword writer.
Scratching hogs

The following extract (Example A) is taken from the foreword written by Lynn Hoffman, in *My Voice Will Go With You: The teaching tales of Milton H. Erickson* (Rosen, 1982), in which Hoffman extols the virtues of Sidney Rosen as editor of this book.

**EXAMPLE A:7**

**HOFFMAN** (In Rosen, 1982: 15-16)

1. The next story is splendid. It is called “Scratching Hogs.”
2. It describes a time when Erickson, who as a young man sold books to pay his way through college, was trying to sell some to a crusty old farmer. The man isn’t having any and tells Erickson to go about his business. Erickson, without thinking, picks up some shingles from the ground and starts scratching the backs of the hogs the farmer is feeding. The farmer changes his mind and agrees to buy Erickson’s books because, as he says, “You know how to scratch hogs.”

11. This is followed by Rosen’s commenting on the story and moving on to the occasion when he first heard it — after he had asked Erickson why he chose Rosen to write the foreword to his book *Hypnotherapy*. After explaining just what things about Rosen had made him wish to entrust the writing of a foreword to him, Erickson added, “I like the way you scratch a hog.”

18. This fragment gives an idea of the tapestried richness of the book. Each tale is treated as a precious object in a collection, full of memories, and Rosen shares with the
reader the different meanings they evoke for him, both as a person and a clinician. If I were a canny fellow, like that farmer, I would buy this book. Sidney Rosen does know how to scratch a hog.

In Rosen’s book (1982), Erickson’s story of ‘scratching hogs’ is treated as an example of unconscious wisdom. According to an Ericksonian perspective the unconscious mind is wiser, more brilliant, than the conscious mind (Havens, 1985; Erickson & Rossi, 1979; Erickson, Rossi & Rossi, 1976), and as such should be trusted to guide the actions of the reader/patient/subject. Erickson’s story is offered by Rosen (1982) as the original example of how scratching hogs can be effective action, directed by the unconscious, in order to achieve a desired goal. The metaphor is also extended, by both Rosen and his foreword writer, Hoffman, to embrace Rosen, as editor/author of a meta analysis of Erickson’s therapeutic ‘teaching tales,’ and offers the editor himself as another shining example of how scratch hogs.

If we now substitute scratching hogs as an example of the wisdom of the unconscious for scratching hogs in order to persuade we can gain an insight into
- how Hoffman has a go at scratching hogs by selling both Erickson and Rosen as good at scratching hogs
- how Erickson sells himself as good at scratching hogs
- how Erickson does hog scratching on the writer of his foreword (Rosen), and
- how Rosen sells both Erickson and himself as good at scratching hogs by presenting
  1. Erickson’s story of his success at scratching hogs and
  2. Rosen’s story about Erickson relating why Rosen is good at scratching hogs
and also, of course,
- how my own textual analysis is itself another bit of hog scratching.
In Example A Hoffman attends to her responsibilities as a foreword writer for Rosen’s book by describing Rosen as a person who knows how to scratch a hog. Rather than referring to an actual physical skill Rosen had developed with regard to hogs, scratching hogs is used metaphorically and, from Hoffman’s telling of the tale, implies that ‘scratching hogs’ has something to do with doing one’s work well. In Hoffman’s story of Erickson and the farmer the difficulty of selling books to the farmer is emphasised by her description of the man as a ‘crusty old farmer’ (line 4) — that is, a difficult, surly type who ‘isn’t having any’ (line 4) and is not likely to be easily persuaded to do what he does not want to do. Having shown the difficulty of the task ahead, Hoffman describes Erickson as picking up some shingles ‘without thinking’ and beginning to scratch the hogs (lines 6-7). This ‘without thinking/thoughtlessly’ description comes before the described act of picking up shingles in each of the three scratching hogs stories, and is an important guide on how to read Erickson’s actions. In Hoffman’s tale it shows that the act of hog scratching is done without conscious deliberation or guile, and as such can be the warrant which renders actions understandable without elaborating upon motives, or goals.

The work of explaining scratching hogs, as an illustration of the wisdom of the unconscious, comes through later, in Rosen’s description (example C) in which “thoughtlessly” constitutes the action as such an example. As in all descriptions ‘thoughtlessly/without thinking’ is pivotal in descriptions of Erickson’s action and the farmer’s response. For Hoffman the act of scratching changes the farmer’s mind (lines 8-10), while ‘without thinking’ defends the young Erickson against any possible accusations that he deliberately manipulated the farmer. At this point in the story, while the tale retains the vividness of the moment (told in the present tense by Hoffman), scratching hogs may still be scratching hogs, but is moving closer to an example of something underlying the physical action. For the farmer in the story it is Erickson’s ability to scratch hogs which sells the books. For the teller of the tale, the author of the book, and the writer of the foreword, it is a metaphor for a deeper understanding of the situation. For the author of this analysis it is a metaphor for persuasion.

Rosen’s ability to scratch hogs is the second example on Hoffman’s list of people who have been informed that they know how to scratch hogs. In her first example, the farmer is reported as telling Erickson ‘You know how to scratch a hog’ (lines 9-10).
She then relates the story that Rosen later tells, in which Erickson says to Rosen ‘I like the way you scratch a hog’ (lines 16-17). This is part of a description of entrusting the job of foreword writing to the right person, in which the right person turns out to be the one who makes a good job of scratching hogs. What we have, in the above example, is what Hoffman makes of Rosen’s account of how he got to be told that he was good at hog scratching, and how Hoffman also does a bit of hog scratching by implication.

Rosen was chosen to write Erickson’s foreword because he could do hog scratching. Hoffman could also be seen to be doing a bit of hog scratching in her praise of Rosen, in which ‘each tale is treated as a precious object’ (line 19). Now, whether this praise, and her ability to understand the intricacies of hog scratching, is an example of Hoffman’s unconscious wisdom or not is a matter for conjecture, but what an analysis of her discussion suggests is the persuasive rhetoric of a foreword writer presenting the book she prefaces as well worth reading. In doing so Hoffman can be seen to have done her job properly.

Hoffman’s third and final example of someone who is told that they know how to scratch a hog is Rosen once again. Hoffman now inserts herself into the story and informs her readers (including, of course, Rosen as editor), that Rosen does know how to scratch a hog (lines 23-24). Hoffman displays herself as knowledgeable about the whole hog scratching business by declaring, emphatically, that ‘Sidney Rosen does know how to scratch a hog’ (lines 23-24). Like the kind of statement that is written on walls in public places, it is both a rebuttal of possible assertions that Sidney Rosen does not know how to scratch a hog, and a confident declaration of truth. Hoffman, as author of the foreword, is close enough to Rosen’s work to state with authority that he really can scratch hogs. In declaring Rosen a person who does know how to scratch a hog, Hoffman aligns herself with a version of the farmer rather different from the one at the beginning of her description. The farmer is no longer a crusty old man, but a ‘canny fellow’ (line 22), the kind of shrewd and clever person who will buy a book from someone who can scratch hogs. We need to remember at this point that this is a story of a farmer who didn’t want to buy books, who changes his mind only because Erickson scratches his hogs. Now, buying unwanted books does not immediately define a person as canny (without wishing to be harsh it is more usually something closer to ‘gullible’). This action is constructed as ‘canny’ in the change of meaning from scratching hogs as a
physical activity, to a metaphoric 'scratching hogs', in which everyone in the tale works successfully, and everything turns out well in the end. As we shall see, in a further analysis of the hog scratching tales (below), one of the flaws in the story, as an account of unconscious wisdom, is that the farmer ends up with books he does not want, and a stranger sharing his supper and spending the night in his spare room. It is not so much the farmer (whether 'crusty' or 'canny') who benefits from any unconscious wisdom, as Erickson the college boy and book peddler.

In the following example the hypnotist himself is conveyed as telling the story of how he came to be scratching hogs, and how scratching hogs got him a book sale, supper, and a bed for the night.

**EXAMPLE B:7**
**ERICKSON** (In Rosen, 1982: 59)

1. One summer I sold books to pay my way through college.
2. I walked into a farmyard about five o'clock, interviewed the farmer about buying books, and he said, "Young fellow, I don't need to read anything. I'm just interested in my hogs."
3. "While you're busy feeding the hogs, do you mind if I stand and talk to you?" I asked.
4. He said, "No, talk away, young fellow, it won't do you a bit of good. I'm not going to pay attention to you; I am busy feeding the hogs."
5. And so I talked about my books. Being a farm boy, I thoughtlessly picked up a pair of shingles lying on the ground and started scratching the hogs' backs as I was talking.
6. The farmer looked over, stopped, and said, "Anybody knows how to scratch a hog's back, the way hogs like it, is somebody I want to know. How about having supper with me tonight and you can sleep overnight with no charge and I will buy your books. You like hogs. You know how to scratch 'em the way
Erickson’s story (with its ‘edited’ rather than spontaneous quality) also describes the farmer as someone unwilling to buy books from the young man. The farmer’s reluctance is illustrated in his reported talk as he tells Erickson ‘I don’t need to read anything. I’m just interested in my hogs’ (lines 3-4), and ‘talk away..it won’t do you a bit of good. I’m not going to pay attention to you; I am busy feeding the hogs’ (lines 7-9). The story constructs a fairly blatant link between the farmer’s lack of interest in Erickson’s books and his declared interest in his hogs, as though through it the reader can watch Erickson’s unconscious in action, making the connection between selling books and scratching hogs. The reader is left in no doubt that the farmer’s hogs are of great importance to him, and this makes the attention that Erickson then directs at the hogs understandable, almost as though we are being given the punch line before the end of the story on the off chance that we might not get it. However Erickson’s hog scratching is not part of a conscious and strategic plan. It is an unconscious, ‘thoughtlessly’ (line 11) performed act, done because Erickson was a farm boy (line 10), and scratching hogs is the sort of thing that farm boys do.

‘Being a farm boy’ elaborates on and explains how the action got to be thoughtless, as an action performed so many times, by a child growing up on a farm, that it has become automatic. Erickson’s hog scratching, as he talks about his books, has an immediate impression on the farmer, and he not only invites him to supper, and then to sleep over ‘with no charge’ (lines 15-16), but also — the jewel in the sand — ‘I will buy your books’ (lines 16-17). There is a kind of breathlessness about Erickson’s list of personal successes after scratching the farmer’s hogs, as though the farmer was so greatly impressed with the young man that he could not do enough for him. As the farmer says, Erickson knows how to scratch hogs the way they like to be scratched (lines 17-18), or rather he knows how to scratch hogs the way that the farmer likes them to be scratched. Erickson’s story is a triumphant one about a young man who manages to sell a farmer books that he has emphatically declared he does not want to buy, and gets free bed and board into the bargain. We do not get a sense, in Erickson’s story, that the farmer has gained all that much from this encounter. Rosen, however, in addressing Erickson’s skill as a hypnotic communicator, suggests that the farmer did benefit from
the meeting with Erickson, since both participants trusted their unconscious, and acted accordingly. This is a further extension of the hog scratching story, which reveals the wisdom beneath the deed and the wisdom behind the response.

Rosen’s book is not only a collection of Erickson’s teaching tales, it is a collection of his own analyses which offers insights and interpretations into the deeper meanings behind Erickson’s stories. In example C Rosen’s analysis follows directly on from Erickson’s story, and elaborates on the success of hog scratching, showing that it works as unconscious action, with the farmer’s response to the young man (line 14, below) offered as a further example of the success of trusting the unconscious.

EXAMPLE C:7
ROSEN (1982: 59-61)

1 Here, Erickson is recounting how he had unconsciously acted in
2 precisely the best way to achieve his purpose — in this case, to
3 sell books. He emphasizes the fact that he had “thoughtlessly”
4 picked up some shingles and scratched the hog’s back as he
5 was talking to the farmer. The farmer unconsciously responded
6 to a man whom he felt to be a kindred soul.

7 Of course, Erickson is not teaching a way to sell books, or to
8 manipulate people. He was genuinely able to relate to this
9 farmer, partly because he too was a farm boy. The action that
10 was effective — the scratching of the hog’s back — could be
11 expressed because Erickson was free in expressing himself. He
12 is urging the listener to trust his own unconscious as he had
13 trusted his unconscious and as the farmer had trusted his own
14 unconscious in responding to the young Erickson.

15 This story also illustrates the principle that I have designated as
16 “Join the patient.”

17 Erickson told me this story in August 1979, after I asked him
why he chose me to write the Foreword to his book

*Hypnotherapy.* Before he began his tale about scratching hogs he had answered, “I liked you and you gave a gold frog to my wife.” (When I had first visited Erickson in 1970, I was returning from Los Angeles to New York with a collection of live snakes, geckos, and frogs. I had given him a beautiful yellow frog as a gift.)

He elaborated, “You made a good impression on me. I liked you. You are genuine. You are honest. You are thoughtful. You are intelligent and you were willing to go from New York to San Francisco or L.A. just because you liked frogs! My impression in this room is — the guy likes carvings. That should be your impression of me. That guy really likes carvings. And there is more to him than sitting in a chair making dollars as a psychoanalyst. He’s got other interests. And frogs are a far step from psychoanalysis and psychiatry, literature, and so on. You’ve got a wide breadth there.”

At the conclusion of his tale he underlined his point by looking directly at me with his clearest and kindliest gaze and commenting, “I like the way you scratch a hog.” He made it clear that he trusted his unconscious in his selection of collaborators, just as he did in other decisions.

If hog scratching can be a metaphor for persuasive back scratching, there is a lot of hog scratching going on in this extract. As Hoffman says — Sidney Rosen does know how to scratch a hog. In Erickson’s story, however, under Rosen’s guidance, scratching hogs is a metaphor for trusting unconscious impulses, in which Rosen (rather unsurprisingly) emerges as one of Erickson’s elected hog scratchers, a man able to follow his unconscious wisdom. ‘Trusting the unconscious’ (lines 12,13,14 & 38) relies on the foundational Ericksonian notion that the unconscious is wise, with the best
outcomes being those which follow unconscious direction. Rosen, reading between the lines of Erickson’s story and guided by an Ericksonian perspective but not particularly by what was actually said in the quotation, describes Erickson’s successful book sale in terms of successful unconscious direction (lines 1-2). While Erickson does not talk explicitly about the unconscious in his hog scratching story, the editor (Rosen) interprets the underlying metaphors and thus informs the reader of what Erickson actually meant by his hog scratching story.

Although Rosen draws attention to Erickson’s description of ‘thoughtlessly’ picking up some shingles to scratch the hog’s back (line 3), attributing the act of emphasizing to Erickson, this is more easily read as Rosen's emphasis, done in the act of drawing attention to the use of the word. In drawing attention to Erickson-as-drawing-attention-to-the-thoughtless-action, Rosen emphasizes the unconsciousness of the act. Rosen makes more of this than Erickson, elaborating both on Erickson’s intentions, and the farmer’s inner responses, as though Rosen is privy to intimate details such as Erickson’s genuineness (line 8) and the farmer’s feelings about Erickson and kindred souls (line 6). In Rosen’s description the book selling incident is constructed as a spiritual encounter, in which the farmer does not lose out by buying the books that he emphatically stated he did not want, but gains by responding unconsciously to a genuine meeting of with a kindred soul.

Rosen intercepts any possible, cynical suggestions that Erickson was just in it for the book sale by stating that, of course, Erickson is not teaching a way of manipulating people or a way to sell books, but that he was genuinely relating to the farmer from his position as a farm boy too (lines 7-9). However, in anticipating that this is an interaction which could easily be misconstrued as a successful sales story, Rosen attends to a mundane understanding of ‘door to door’ selling, in which a young man wants to sell books to a stranger, and rather than leaving when he is told that the farmer is not interested in buying his books, stays around to ‘talk’ (rather like door to door religious people who ostensibly just want to talk). While he is talking Erickson scratches the farmer’s hogs, the farmer’s declared main interest, and the farmer changes his mind and

22 And, of course, in drawing attention to Rosen drawing attention to Erickson as drawing attention, I am able to construct emphasis as rhetoric. And in drawing attention to my...
23 And this analysis itself may be guilty of misconstruing the situation. By redefining scratching hogs as persuasion I am shifting the emphasis from a kind of spiritual interaction to a more mercenary bit of back scratching.
says that he will buy the books after all. An initial reading of this, were the reader not
guided by Rosen’s analysis, might be to assume that Erickson got what he was after all
along — a book sale, while the farmer got what he did not want all along — a book sale.

Rosen’s account of his own personal experience, and how he got awarded the
description of hog scratcher by Erickson, is a detailed one which dwells upon the various
claimed virtues of the writer (Rosen), and his assumed aptness therefore as an interpreter
of Erickson’s teaching tales. This example of hog scratching, from a ‘you scratch my
back’ perspective, is fairly explicit as Erickson tells his foreword writer that he likes him
(lines 20 & 25-26), and gives a list of reasons,²⁴ beginning with a description of frog
collecting (lines 20-24). The frog collecting example nicely illustrates Rosen’s ability to
be more than a stuffy clinician. It shows him (in the presentation of it) to be a man who
knows how to live, he travels, collects carvings and live creatures — he is a person of
‘wide breadth’ (line 34). The description, as a good reason, also gives credence to the
claim by Erickson that he likes Rosen. Sandwiched within the frog example is a fairly
straightforward bit of back scratching. Erickson tells Rosen that he is genuine, honest,
thoughtful, and intelligent, and to cap it all he is willing to travel the length of the
country because he like frogs! The reliability of this description as a true account of
Rosen, the man who is willing to travel for frogs, is constituted in Rosen’s aside that he
had travelled from Los Angeles to New York with a collection of live creatures, and
backed up by the report of Erickson saying ‘you were willing to go from New York to
San Francisco or L.A.’ (lines 27-28). The slight uncertainty over whether it was San
Francisco or L.A. gives a genuineness to Erickson’s reported talk, as though he
remembered the incident of nine years ago well enough to have an impression of the man
who collects frogs, and well enough to remember that he travelled great distances to
collect these creatures, without having to recall the specific detail of whether it was L.A.
or San Francisco — just that it was somewhere in California.

This is a lovely example of what Rosen has described as ‘Join the patient’ (lines
15-16), with Erickson (the therapist) joining Rosen (the patient) in his world of frogs and
carvings, where recipients of frog gifts are impressed (rather than displeased), and where
Erickson shows that he too likes carvings. In the description (lines 29-32) the two

²⁴ Note the detail of the remembered month and year as though the incident is still vivid in the
author’s memory and is therefore warranted as a reliable source of information (Ashmore,
clinicians come together as men with other interests and who thus have ‘wide breadth.’ Having ‘joined the patient,’ Erickson reinforces the positive message (the therapeutic treatment) by listing Rosen’s virtues. We may also speculate upon the (therapeutic) outcome to this bit of back scratching by remembering that Rosen was Erickson’s foreword writer, and suggesting that if we (for the sake of this analysis) view Rosen momentarily as a metaphoric hog, he would probably, at this point in Erickson’s account of his virtuous qualities, be enjoying a very thorough and satisfactory scratch, and be well predisposed to respond with an enthusiastic foreword for Erickson’s book on hypnotherapy.

In interpreting Erickson’s declaration that Rosen can scratch hogs as evidence that Erickson trusted his unconscious (line 38) to chose him as a ‘collaborator’ (line 39), Rosen shows himself to be ideally suited for the job of presenting Erickson’s teaching tales in conjunction with his own interpretative analysis. Rosen’s authority is both constituted within and endorsed by the story that ‘Mr. Hypnosis’ himself, the expert on unconscious communication, has said that he likes the way that Rosen can scratch a hog. That is — the expert on following his unconscious wisdom likes the way that Rosen trusts his unconscious to know what is best. In relating this tale Rosen is not only scratching his own back, more importantly he is scratching the reader’s back. Scratching hogs is a story told to illustrate how good the author of the text is at scratching hogs, and in doing so he is still scratching hogs. By presenting himself as a skilful person who has been praised as such by Erickson and chosen by Erickson because of this skill, Rosen persuasively constructs himself as someone who knew Erickson closely and was thus able to define (in his book) the underlying meaning in Erickson’s teaching tales.

As I have suggested at various points in my analysis of the ‘scratching hogs’ stories, this reading of the metaphor as persuasive ‘back scratching’ is also applicable to an analysis of my own text, (as is a Rosen/Erickson perspective which might suggest that had I followed the wisdom of my unconscious, my analysis would have been of the right kind). My own hog scratching works around the success I might have in deconstructing the text in a credible way, ‘revealing’ topics of analysis, (such as unconscious wisdom), to be constituted within the author’s text.
This authorial hogwash is the kind of footnote reflexivity that lurks in the textual unconscious of this thesis, and every now and again seeps into footnotes, bracketed asides and chapter summaries, as the writer (MacMillan) remembers her claim to a reflexive thesis and declares 'me quoque' (a kind of 'this applies to me too' reflexive trope). Meanwhile, since I'm practising a bit of 'provocative therapy' and goading the authors to cut the hogwash, I may also point out that what we have is another fine example of unconscious linguistic rhetoric. 'Hogwash' is an unconscious link with tales of 'scratching hogs' and 'back-scratching' Here we have it —

hog scratching → hog(wash) → (wash/back) → (back) scratching
(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).

In the final example (below), Evangeline Scribbler's foreclosure for this chapter (including her poem) performs its analysis by reflecting the examples which have come before. This represents a turn on the spiral, in which Scribbler's parody highlights the rhetoric of the previous turns. Of course this act of parody is itself a rhetorical turn — I am, after all, in the business of scratching hogs myself.

However, rather than alarming my reader by implying any (metaphorical) resemblance to a hog, or that he may be subjected to persuasive devices, it might be fitting to treat the following example as a way of trusting the unconscious. The foreclosure offers a meeting place for kindred souls. It's not that I'm trying to sell you a thesis here, of course. The poem has been written because Scribbler genuinely wanted to write it.
Scratching hogs: The final analysis

EXAMPLE D:7
SCRIBBLER (1996: 185-6)

When Katie MacMillan commissioned me to write this foreclosure on Scratching Hogs: The final analysis, I asked her what it was about me that made me such an appropriate choice for the job.

"Because, Evangeline," she said in her clear and insightful way, "you sure know how to scratch a hog."

Experienced as I am in unconscious communication, I knew that the deep underlying message of her succinct description showed a confidence in the brilliance of my unconsciously created poetry, and the symbolic meaning that my collection of rare Madagascar ring-tailed lemurs, pinned to the walls of my living-room in thought provoking and tasteful arrangements, had impacted upon her.

‘Hog Scratching’ is a result of that meeting of (unconscious) minds.
Hog Scratching

Scratching hogs when they are feeding
Collecting frogs when they are breeding
Getting introverts to bark like dogs
Getting insomniacs to sleep like logs
Getting old farmers who won't read a thing
To buy college books all tied up with string
Getting academics when they are reading
To think my thoughts without conceding
These are some deeds as sweet as breathing
These are a few of my favourite things.

*
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GREAT PRETENDER: Hypnosis Revealed

Here is a template
on the world.
Held on my tongue,
Trapped in my tome.
I am intoxicated
By my own sight,

All words are charmed.
Meno's slave
echoes my vision.
(Which, of course,
is exactly
what I knew I would write).
(Scribbler. Resident poet. Now speaking.)

In this chapter I offer a rhetorical analysis of two apparently contrasting perspectives:

1:- hypnosis as a powerful and special state
and
2:- hypnosis as a role which people can simulate

in an attempt to show that what these versions achieve, for the proponent of each perspective, is not so very different after all. Whether the teller of a particular tale of hypnosis is a stage hypnotist, revealing his skill in handling hypnotic power, or a social psychologist demonstrating hypnosis as compliance, they both involve an account of, or a demonstration by, the expert of whichever persuasion, in which the subject does
exactly what he is told. Paul McKenna, a well-known stage hypnotist,\(^1\) treats hypnosis as a powerful phenomenon which practitioners need to use wisely, when making people do amazing things. It is a discursive position that indexes McKenna himself as someone powerful enough, and experienced enough, to handle hypnosis properly. Graham Wagstaff, a social psychologist, simulates a standard stage hypnosis act in order to show that what really goes on is nothing mysterious at all, but, rather, a performance of roles, influenced by social expectations and compliance. In an analysis of his televised demonstration, however, I suggest that Wagstaff gets his subject to comply with his own suggestions. In much the same way that McKenna illustrates his expertise as a hypnotist, and Wagstaff illustrates his expertise as a social psychologist, (time for some more footnote reflexivity — ‘me quoque’ —) I illustrate my expertise as a rhetorical analyst, by persuading my readers of the validity of my analysis.

For Wagstaff, it is our shared social understanding of hypnosis which governs the way we will behave in hypnotic situations, while for McKenna, hypnosis exists as a powerful phenomenon which can be used by the hypnotist to influence the way people behave.

A mysterious power

If you could bottle hypnosis, it would undoubtedly be the most powerful drug in the world.\(^2\)

(McKenna, 1993: 95)

McKenna’s specific notion of hypnosis as a power reflects a traditional cultural notion, echoed in popular fiction and media. Descriptions not only imply its far reaching curative powers, but also, in sensationalizing hypnosis, perpetuate a notion of mysterious mind control, and as such sell songs, stories, newspapers, movies, and tickets to stage shows. The hypnotist is portrayed as someone who can manipulate its power, for good

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1 According to the *Radio Times* (18-24 March 1995: 85), McKenna is ‘Britain’s best known hypnotist.’

2 Paul McKenna (1993) admits that bottling hypnosis is unfortunately not possible. His solution ‘which is just as good’ (*ibid*: 95) is that the hypnotist’s suggestions can be video recorded. Not surprisingly, McKenna’s eulogizing of hypnosis follows a description of his range of commercially available hypnotherapy videos, obtainable from an address given in his book.
or for evil. For example, in *The Mesmerist* (Picano, 1977), a paperback thriller, the main character is portrayed as

A Man Possessed of The Power Of Hypnotic Evil, The Power
To Enslave Women\(^3\) And To Tyrannise An Entire Community

*ibid*: backcover blurb.

Likewise, George du Maurier (1895), in his famous tale of *Trilby*, portrays the anti-hero, Svengali, as an evil influence\(^4\) —

He’s a bad fellow, Svengali — I’m sure of it! He
mesmerised you; that’s what it is — mesmerism!
I’ve often heard of it, but never seen it done before.
They get you into their power, and make you do any
blessed thing they please — lie, murder, steal —
anything! and kill yourself into the bargain when
they’ve done with you! It’s just too terrible to think of!

*ibid*: 72

Descriptions of hypnotists imposing their will upon their subjects are not confined to dramatic fiction. In a newspaper report on hypnosis (see below), a reporter describes how hypnotherapy not only worked therapeutically for her, but also felt like mind control at the same time. The reporter’s story is an adventure of a struggle — both with the feeling that her mind was being controlled, and between her own subconscious and conscious mind for muscular control of her body — in which the writer emerges unscathed but therapeutically changed. This tale of control implies that, regardless of any objective, testable outcomes of hypnosis, there is a true subjective experience of it in which it seems as if the hypnotist is the one who is in control. There is a tension, in such descriptions, between reassuring the reader that hypnosis is safe (but not too safe), and

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\(^3\) Another turn, a feminist analysis, might point out that this traditional portrayal, of a male hypnotist imposing his will upon his female subjects, perpetuates the notion of women as 'victims,' and reflects their historical subjugation (e.g., pathologized as 'hysterical' by the medical [male] 'expert' [Ehrenreich and English, 1978]).

\(^4\) Trilby ignores the Laird’s advice and becomes obsessed with Svengali. Although Svengali establishes her as a famous singer, so strong is his power and influence over Trilby that when he dies her voice collapses, she loses her fame, and languishes into a premature death.
emphasizing its power (but not as too dangerous). Such ‘conciliatory’ and ‘extravagant’ repertoires (apologies to Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984), used in a single account, indexes the author/speaker — for example, as an intrepid reporter, or an expert practitioner (see below), and manages the dubious reputation of hypnosis as mind control and manipulation, while at the same time maintaining its excitement and newsworthiness.

In a Daily Express introduction which precedes three reporters’ experiences of hypnotherapy, hypnosis is described as a ‘much misunderstood phenomenon’ which, for centuries, has been associated with ‘spiritualism, witchcraft and mind control.’ The tabloid headings reassure us that ‘in reality, hypnotherapy is no more dangerous than going to sleep.’ However, the focus of the first report, an article by Jane Warren (1994: 31. ‘Can hypnosis really change your life?’), is not on safe, sleep-like states, but on a (nail-biting) account of suggestibility and a struggle for control. Warren describes her visits to a London-based hypnotherapist, ostensibly in order to break her nail-biting habit, but also to report a visit to a hypnotherapist for a daily tabloid. In her descriptions of the hypnotherapist Warren uses a familiar and dramatic portrayal of hypnosis and mind control.

There is something of the dominatrix [sic] about Samantha Wilson,...she wears high-heeled black leather boots and has masses of dark curls. She stares at people directly, unblinkingly, and I feel she is taking control of my mind — although she disputes that, saying the client always remains in control.

(Warren, 1994: 31)

Warren describes her (three) hypnosis sessions with Wilson, the hypnotherapist, in which the hypnotist ‘lulls’ her into a hypnotic state, and then uses a test, which the reporter states is designed both for ‘the hypnotist and a sceptical client such as myself [Warren],’ to show that the subject has indeed gone ‘under’ (ibid). Warren’s description of herself as sceptical displays her as a discerning reporter, not readily taken in by
hypnosis until she has seen for herself that it really works. However, in her account of her therapy sessions, the reporter’s initial scepticism is quickly dispelled as she experiences the compelling presence of the hypnotist — as though Wilson were taking control of her client with her powerful gaze (as hypnotists are traditionally expected to do). Wilson’s behaviour, as someone who ’stares at people directly, unblinkingly,’ is scripted (see Edwards, 1994) into a description of the hypnotist being the kind of person who looks at everyone, not just Warren, in this way. This account strengthens the reporter’s description of mind control, in which it is not the susceptibility or reckless imagination of the reporter which made her feel as though she was being controlled, but something characteristic of the hypnotist.

Regardless of whether the client really does always remain ‘in control’ (supported in the newspaper’s description that hypnosis is not about mind control, and that it is in fact as safe as sleep), Warren’s description conveys a striking personal experience of how hypnosis really feels. Her description reflects a struggle with hypnotist and hypnosis in which hypnosis wins. The reporter tries, and fails, to open her eyes. She finds herself responding to suggestions such as muscular rigidity, in which her arm becomes ‘like an iron bar that will support itself’ (Warren, 1994: 31).

My breathing rate slows. I realise that although I feel fully conscious I am unable to move my body or open my eyes. I battle with myself to prove that I can, but I can’t.

(ibid)

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5 Like Descartes (1947 [1637]), who doubted the existence of everything but himself, and the Popperian (Popper, 1959; 1963) scientist for whom the essence of science is the effort to falsify claims, Warren’s reference to her own initial scepticism of hypnosis is persuasive. The power of hypnosis is objectified by her denial of any kind of bias in its favour (see Edwards, in press; Potter, 1996).

6 On the front cover of Theodore Barber, Nicholas Spanos and John Chaves’s (1974) book (a study which claims to expose traditional notions of hypnosis as misleading, and offers an alternative account of hypnosis as role-playing), there is a picture of intensely staring eyes and a swinging pendulum — an interestingly stereotypical image (like the ‘Fu Manchu’ movies, and mind control through hypnotic eyes) which perpetuates the very image the authors are attempting to debunk.

7 And such a description of control would be rhetorically useful for the therapist if, for example, the client did not stop biting her nails after all. From this perspective it is not that the treatment did not work, but that, in the end, it was the client, in charge of whether she allowed the treatment to work or not, who failed to respond to the procedure.

8 See also Cheek and LeCron (1968) for a description of mind control as a popular misconception about hypnosis.
Warren's account of her experience of hypnosis constitutes it as an issue of control, in her dramatic description of her battle to move her limbs. In her use of a 'conciliatory' repertoire, Warren reassures the reader that she is not promoting something dangerous — in hypnotic trance (as safe as sleep) the client always remains in control. However, if hypnosis was just as safe as sleep and Warren had simply remained in control, then her story would have little popular interest. Her parallel use of an 'extravagant' repertoire promotes and maintains the excitement of the topic, a battle for control of her own body, and in doing so supports the familiar image of an intrepid news reporter.

An extravagant description of hypnosis can also be used boastfully, as a display of the hypnotist's skill in controlling its power, with the overt 'reassurance' conveying the hypnotist's authority, rather than the subject's control. In a newspaper article on Paul McKenna ('Casting a spell to make a million..'), Rachel Dixon (1994: 54), a reporter for the Sunday Mirror, describes the stage hypnotist and television entertainer as being able to 'put dozens of people into a deep sleep from which they emerge to perform amazing feats.' McKenna is quoted by Rachel Dixon as saying that, in his job as a hypnotist, he has seen 'shy bank clerks' transformed, in trance, into 'outrageous personalities who think they are Michael Jackson' (ibid). Within such stories of people suddenly turning into outrageous personalities, or performing amazing feats, there is not only a portrayal of the hypnotist's power to do extraordinary things, but also a possible interpretation which could be used to accuse the hypnotist of manipulating people against their will, for the sake of entertainment.

This potentially damaging description of hypnosis as mind control is attended to both in the (above) report in which the hypnotist is quoted as saying that the client always remains in control (Warren, 1994), and within McKenna's reported description (below) of how he uses hypnosis to facilitate the subject's potential to be creative, while ensuring that they do nothing they would not wish to.

I allow people to access their own creativity and imagination. But I never allow people to do things that go against their moral code.

(McKenna, in Dixon, 1994).
Note that McKenna describes how he allows his subjects to be creative, and will never allow them to go against their moral code. While this might be offered as an assurance that McKenna can safeguard against anything dangerous or unethical happening to his subjects, it implicitly contradicts any claim that the subject/client might remain in control, in trance. McKenna treats that as something which he ‘allows,’ while conveying the impression that he doesn’t have to! This account portrays McKenna as someone who has the power to make people do strange things, but also, because he is an ethical hypnotist, to keep their behaviour within reasonable limits — that is, to only go as far as he judges the subjects themselves would wish to go. This retains the impression (vital for a stage hypnotist) that the hypnotist is in command, but also that McKenna, at least, can be trusted not to abuse this power. Furthermore, it also conveys an impression of McKenna’s experience and authority to recognize just what constitutes an individual’s moral code, and how not to go against it.

**An ethical hypnotist**

Unskilled hypnotists may give subjects foolish suggestions, just as they do in stage hypnosis to get cheap laughs, but there are no dangers if a hypnotist is qualified and ethical.

*(Daily Express March 24th, 1994: 32-3)*

Accounts of hypnosis, as I suggested in chapter five, frequently attend to its dubious reputation as a way of showing the truth about its practice. In ‘HOW IT WORKS’ *(ibid)*, a report in the *Daily Express* on hypnotherapy, the reputation hypnosis has for making people do things against their will is explained (but, as in McKenna’s account, not denied) as part of unethical practices such as stage hypnosis. Hypnosis is portrayed as powerful — dangerous in the hands of the unskilled, safe when used by qualified practitioners. For example, in the *Daily Express* article on hypnosis (‘if you can fall asleep you can be hypnotised’ *[ibid]*), the report describes the benefits of hypnotherapy, and the dangers of its misuse, with the comforting information that ‘qualified’ *(ibid)* hypnotists can be trusted to use hypnosis wisely.
The far reaching power of hypnosis is also constituted within descriptions of therapy, and how hypnosis is available to treat an extensive variety of ailments. The suggestion that it can be used to treat a 'wide range' of 'problems' including 'learning difficulties, emotional problems and most phobias' (ibid), 9conveys the impressive healing abilities of hypnosis, its suitability for most people, and therefore its relevance for Express readers — unlike, for example, a possible description of hypnosis in which its effectiveness as a treatment for firefly phobias or compulsive ear twitches might be presented as one of its most striking virtues.

Hypnosis works, according to the article (ibid), by creating a state of heightened inner awareness in the client, which brings about desired changes. The vagueness and the brevity of the tabloid description on how hypnosis works helps to maintain a mystique about hypnosis and, without saying very much at all, supports the implication that, in order to properly induce this state of heightened inner attention, the hypnotist needs to be a qualified expert in her practice of therapy, diagnosis and treatment.10

Qualifications and training, in various newspaper reports and advertising leaflets, are signalled by including letters after the hypnotist’s name. For example, in Warren’s (1994) report (above) of her therapy session with the hypnotherapist, Wilson’s name is followed by the letters ‘CHt, MABCH, McAH Hyp, ITEC, MHPA.’ Another Daily Express reporter, Alison Tapp, describes her hypnotherapy session with a hypnotherapist whom she subsequently cites with the letters BA, MCHC, CHC (UK) MAPT after his name. My own training in hypnosis awarded certification, and the letters CMH at the end of the first course, and CHyp., at the end of the second, ‘advanced’ course. In advertising leaflets, distributed inside the free local newspapers, members of the ‘Institute of Hypnosis and Parapsychology,’ use the letters A.I.H.P., L.I.H.P. and L.A.S.M., and call themselves stress management consultants, stating that they are


10 According to Alison Tapp (1994: 32), a reporter for the Daily Express, ‘most people think they know what the problem is, but a hypnotherapist is trained to find the root cause.’
registered practitioners, insured against malpractice. The presence of a collection of untranslated letters offer a to-be-taken-for-granted symbol of the hypnotist’s qualification to practice as a therapist, signalling her authority and expertise in her subject — regardless of what these letters might actually stand for.¹¹

Paul McKenna’s hypnotic show¹²

In contrast to descriptions of the qualified and experienced hypnotist being someone who has undergone formal training, Paul McKenna (1993) suggests a different kind of expertise, in which he has figured out for himself exactly how hypnosis works. In his book, aimed at a general audience, McKenna describes what hypnosis is, how effective it is, and the story of how he came to be a hypnotist. The hypnotist’s account of a self-taught understanding of the phenomenon is a persuasive one, with the truth of exactly how hypnosis works suddenly being revealed to the questing student of hypnosis in a flash of realization. McKenna begins his tale by relating his chance interview (as a radio DJ) with a local hypnotist. McKenna asks the hypnotist to put him into trance and is ‘truly amazed’ (ibid: 61) by the experience. The hypnotist then lends McKenna some books on hypnosis, and a short time later, when McKenna goes to a stage hypnotist’s show at a nearby theatre, his book learning falls into place.

EXTRACT I: 8

1. I had seen hypnotists before,
2. but this time it all made sense.
3. It was as though,
4. about twenty minutes into the show,
5. a light-bulb flashed on in my brain.

¹¹ Training courses in hypnosis abound, with each institution offering the qualifying hypnotist a different set of letters. These courses may claim to be selective (e.g. The ‘British Society of Clinical Hypnotherapists’ state on their ‘Invitation to Join’ that ‘Membership of the BSCH will always be exclusive to those hypnotherapists who are in the very top percentage of the profession’ (original emphasis). What this means, however, is that members should have been trained at ‘reputable training establishments,’ approved by the Executive Committee of the BSCH, including those who have trained with the ‘London College of Clinical Hypnosis.’ (The principal of LCCH is also the president of BSCH).

¹² A quote from McKenna’s book on hypnosis (McKenna, 1993: 61).
6. All that I had read, all the theory,
7. suddenly made sense and I could see
8. exactly how hypnosis worked.

(ibid:62)

In line 6 McKenna gives the impression that the previously mentioned ‘some books’ (ibid: 61) lent by the hypnotist, were considered and considerable academic texts. He conveys the concentrated time, over a ‘few weeks’ (ibid), spent reading and studying his topic, when suddenly, in a flash, as he watched a practical demonstration of hypnosis, all that he had learnt became conscious, and he realized exactly how hypnosis works. This account, like Robin Wooffitt’s (1992) study of reports of paranormal events, presents the extraordinariness of his realization of exactly how hypnosis worked as arising from within a fairly ordinary context (see also Jefferson, 1984; Sacks, 1992). In Wooffitt’s research into accounts of the paranormal he proposes that the accounting procedure ‘I was just doing X...when Y’ (1992: 117) is a feature of descriptions of extraordinary occurrences, where X can be regarded as a ‘state formulation’ that the speaker uses in order to situate herself within the ordinariness of everyday life. This description can then convey to the listener that the speaker, like any other person, was just getting on with the daily business of living, when — suddenly — Y happened. Within McKenna’s description the ordinariness of X is going to see a stage hypnosis show, which McKenna had done before. By stating that he had seen hypnotists before (line 1) McKenna intimates that it isn’t necessarily a built in feature of stage shows, that they offer immediate insight into how hypnosis works — it is his own careful study of hypnosis which achieves this. The difference between this stage show and other stage shows that he had seen before, is that this time he had read the theoretical explanations of hypnosis. Suddenly he is no longer just another member of the audience, just another uninformed spectator — he is an initiate.

McKenna recreates the drama of a light-bulb flashing in his brain (line 5) (also a familiar and graphic description of inspiration and insight seen in cartoon caricatures of getting the message), building up a sense of tension by relating that it was about twenty minutes into the show (line 4) when something happened. The specific timing of ‘about
twenty minutes' is nicely persuasive,\textsuperscript{13} revealing McKenna to be surprised (as anyone might be) of what happened to him next. He wasn't clock watching, waiting for something more dramatic than the stage hypnotist's performance to happen (as a more precise twenty three minutes, for example, might have suggested), and yet, neither was he so inattentive or engrossed as to be unaware of the time. While insight may take time, if McKenna had said about seventy minutes, rather than twenty, the reader might have concluded that McKenna was a bit slow on the uptake, (with seventy minutes situated nearer to the end of the show, and twenty minutes closer to the beginning). The 'about twenty minutes' lays the theoretical foundations for why what came next came next. While McKenna was watching the stage hypnotist his unconscious mind was at work integrating the theory he had already learned, with the practice of stage hypnosis that he was watching. McKenna's portrayal of himself as someone who read the theory and then was quickly able to integrate it with the practice and see exactly how hypnosis works, conveys his professional expertise now as a television and stage hypnotist, as an authority on hypnotherapy, and also as a reliable source of information, as the author of a book on how hypnosis works.

McKenna's story of how he came to understand exactly how hypnosis works has implicit within it an account of how subjects can be made to behave according to suggestion. Hypnosis is a powerful phenomenon, and the experienced hypnotist knows exactly how it works. In stage displays of hypnosis it is seen as extraordinary, with subjects able to perform 'amazing feats' (Dixon, 1994: 54), such as behaving as if they were Michael Jackson, barking like dogs, or eating an onion as though it were an apple (see below). According to McKenna (bearing in mind, of course, that he is a stage hypnotist), such stage performances can be taken as proof that hypnosis works.

I consider stage hypnotism as much an art as anything else. Even though there are a few therapists who deride the use of hypnosis 'merely' for entertainment, others have acknowledged that its great benefit is it shows people hypnosis works.

(McKenna, 1993:73. Original emphasis).

\textsuperscript{13} See Sacks on 'members measurements,' (1992, Vol.II).
However, for others, stage hypnosis is used to illustrate how ‘hypnosis’ works, not as a phenomenon, but as social compliance.

**Stage hypnosis: How it works**

much of the lore about ‘hypnotic trance’ seems to derive from the performances that are observed in stage hypnotism (Barber, Spanos & Chaves, 1974: 99).

At first glance, it appears that after the stage hypnotist has placed his subject in a hypnotic trance state, he can make him perform weird antics (such as dancing with an invisible partner or singing like Frank Sinatra) and can exert an amazing physiological control over the subject (such as stopping the circulation and pulse in the arm). A close look at stage hypnosis, however, does not support the special state paradigm. (Barber, 1972: 132-3).

The whole thing is supposed to demonstrate that people can simulate hypnosis, and that many of the things which people think are unusual about hypnosis can actually be simulated quite easily by people who are totally untrained. So for instance eating an onion whilst pretending it’s an apple might sound extraordinary to some people but in fact virtually anybody could do it if they’re sufficiently motivated. (Wagstaff, 1994. Transcript).

According to Graham Wagstaff (1991: 363), there are a number of ‘mundane concepts and processes’ which can explain hypnotic phenomena, with emphasis placed
on the influence of social and cognitive factors, such as compliance and beliefs. From Wagstaff’s ‘nonstate, sociocognitive’ perspective there is a crucial difference between believing one is in trance and ‘actually being in one’ (ibid: 365. Original emphasis), thus while the subject may believe he is in trance, this cannot be taken as proof that trance exists. Wagstaff reconceptualizes hypnosis in terms of compliant behaviour, as influenced by the social and individual expectations surrounding the hypnotic situation, and shared understandings of the roles of hypnotized subjects and hypnotists. Stage hypnotists, according to this perspective (e.g. Barber, 1972; Barber, Spanos & Chaves, 1974; Wagstaff, 1981; 1991; 1994), may perform impressive looking demonstrations, but these same results can be achieved by most people in ordinary circumstances, without trance inductions or mesmeric passes (and given sufficient motivation).

Theodore Barber (1972), like Wagstaff, treats hypnosis as a topic of analysis, explaining stage hypnosis from a cognitive-behaviourist perspective, and suggesting that common understandings (and misconceptions) about hypnosis are influenced by what people have seen or heard from stage shows. Barber argues that hypnosis does not exist as a special state, and that trance and the matter of mind control can be explained in terms of stage tricks, social behaviour and expectations. By revealing the tricks of the hypnotist’s trade, Barber (and also Wagstaff, see below) shows that what ‘actually occurs in stage hypnotism’ (Barber et al, 1974: 99) is a staged performance manipulated by the hypnotist and governed by compliance and social roles.

In outlining the ‘four major principles and four secondary principles’ (Barber, 1972: 133) underlying stage hypnosis, Barber proposes that the ‘weird antics’ (ibid) of the subject can be viewed as a result, not of hypnosis, but of motivations and expectancies towards the hypnotic situation. For Barber, major principles of stage hypnosis rely on

1: - responsiveness 2: - selection 3: - situation 4: - setting

14 Using the principle of Occam’s razor, Wagstaff (1991) argues that rather than attempting to explain hypnosis as a special state, in terms of some mysterious other factor, hypnosis can best be explained by what is already known. For the social psychologist this means that a ‘more appropriate vocabulary’ (ibid: 365) used to explain hypnotic behaviour would include ‘conformity,’ ‘compliance,’ belief,’ ‘attitudes,’ ‘expectations’… ‘role enactment,’ and ‘imagination.’
and that behind these principles is the stage hypnotist’s knowledge that

1. People are more responsive to suggestions (regardless of trance procedures) than is generally assumed.
2. Highly responsive subjects are easily selected through a series of tests (for example volunteer subjects are asked to clasp their hands and then are told that they cannot unclasp them).
3. The situation known as ‘hypnosis’ dictates a high response to suggestion, because of shared common assumptions about the nature of being hypnotized.
4. There are generally shared expectancies about how to behave as a subject of stage hypnosis, and it is these which influence how the subject will respond to suggestions.

The secondary principles of stage hypnosis, Barber suggests, are the devices which stage hypnotists use in order for their performance to appear as if the subject is in trance, as she responds to the hypnotist’s suggestions. Barber describes how hypnotists are known to whisper instructions for the subject to hear and respond to, which will go unnoticed by the audience. Hypnotists may also make suggestions without asking the subject if this suggestion has been effective (he may, for example, suggest rigidity of muscles without then asking the subject to try and bend the ‘rigid’ limb). The hypnotist may also use pretrained subjects to demonstrate such ‘amazing’ feats as the ‘human-plank’ stunt (ibid: 137), in which the subject lies across two chairs, supported beneath his shoulders and calves, while someone stands upon his chest. This ‘trick,’ Barber states, can be performed by most ‘normal male’ (ibid) subjects without being in a special state, or going through special state procedures.

According to Theodore Barber, Nicholas Spanos and John Chaves (1974: 99), what occurs in stage hypnotism is a process of selecting the most highly responsive subjects from a group of volunteers. Trance-like behaviour occurs because of expectations, about the power and effectiveness of the hypnotist and hypnotic situation, that will make the subject do amazing things. The atmosphere of the stage settings, music, lights, combined with individual tension and excitement, and the audience’s, hypnotist’s, and subject’s own expectancy, all contribute to the performance which follows. From this perspective, what McKenna saw, when a light-bulb flashed on in his
brain (see example 1:8, line 5), was not exactly how hypnosis worked after all, but exactly how a stage hypnotist got a staged performance of hypnosis to work.

Describing how stage hypnotists make ‘hypnosis’ appear as if it works, or telling the story of how a student of hypnosis was able to see exactly how hypnosis works, both constitute a particular kind of hypnosis within the tale. McKenna’s (1993: 95) version of hypnosis as a powerful ‘drug,’ which he knows exactly how to work, constructs him as an expert, someone who knows what he is talking about (in his book on hypnosis), and someone who can handle hypnosis wisely, both as a therapist and a stage performer. As I shall suggest, below, Graham Wagstaff (1994), in a televised demonstration of hypnosis as compliance, shows how hypnotic behaviour can be simulated by a willing subject, and in doing so presents his ‘mundane,’ social psychological version of hypnosis as the correct perspective.

Wagstaff’s illustration of ‘hypnosis,’ set up in order to debunk it and show that trance is really a matter of social roles, is itself an impressive performance, indexical of his role as a social psychologist. Influenced by social expectations, the social psychologist dramatically performs his own role in accordance with the kinds of things that social psychology has to say about its topic of analysis. Whereas for McKenna a stage performance of hypnosis is an opportunity for people to see that it works (and for the informed student a chance to see exactly how it works), Wagstaff treats stage hypnosis as an example of how expectations about the hypnotic situation influence the behaviour of the subjects, with both the hypnotist and subject acting out roles. From this sociocognitive perspective the stage performer is ‘playing the part’ of a hypnotist (Barber, 1972: 139), using various trade tricks in order for the performance to look as if hypnosis, as a phenomenon, is really taking place.

**Hypnosis: From crisis to performance**

Sarbin and Coe (1972) have pointed out how the various exponents of magnetism and later hypnosis managed to produce the responses according to their theoretical viewpoints. Thus Mesmer, who believed that he was transmitting an invisible fluid into his patients which
would excite them, managed to send a lot of them into crisis.

Hypnosis, once viewed as crisis, now takes a rerun as performance. Wagstaff points out (above) that Sarbin and Coe (1972) have pointed out that, historically, exponents of hypnosis have managed to produce responses in accordance with their theoretical viewpoint. Thus while Mesmer’s patients fell into ‘crisis’ (see chapter six of this thesis) and what appeared to be hysterical faints, James Braid’s patient’s seemed quietly relaxed and ‘well behaved’ (Wagstaff, 1981: 6). This perspective offers an interpretation of hypnosis as influenced by various social factors, and in particular social and individual expectations. Mesmer’s patients expected to go into crisis, and so crisis occurred. Braid’s patients expected to be quietly entranced, and so this is how they behaved. The next move, the next logical twist upon the analytical spiral, is to show how Wagstaff’s argument stops short of applying this sociocognitive perspective to his own analysis. This next turn, a standard tu quoque (Ashmore, 1989), and a missed opportunity by Wagstaff, is now claimed as my own.

As Mesmer demonstrated the effects of animal magnetism, so Wagstaff demonstrates (see below) the effects of social influence. Compliant behaviour, for Wagstaff, is influenced by people’s shared understandings of what hypnosis is (or, as Barber (1972) suggests, misunderstandings, since hypnosis is revealed as a skilful sleight of hand, tongue, and trickery). These shared understandings are assumed to be something outside of Wagstaff’s demonstration, with his role, as a social psychologist, being to uncover these preconceived notions of hypnosis. Compliance is thus shown by Wagstaff in his demonstration, without being considered as part of the demonstration itself, and how this might influence the students’ behaviour. What I suggest is that it is Wagstaff’s version of hypnosis, in his demonstration, which cues the students to go along with illustrating Wagstaff’s argument, and to ‘confess’ (line 10, below) that they weren’t in a real trance.

15 For a neat linguistic link between ‘crisis’ and ‘performance’ (under ‘completion’) see Peter Roget’s Thesaurus (1901: 238-239).

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Ironically, an argument which supports Wagstaff's proposal that hypnotic behaviour is influenced by social expectations also undermines his case. In demonstrating that his subjects simulate hypnosis because of situational expectations this, logically, illustrates that his subjects are simulating hypnosis because of the expectations surrounding Wagstaff's televised debunking of hypnosis. The implication of the tu quoque here is that the success of Wagstaff's demonstration, in proving his point, relies on the students' compliance with the social psychologist's own theoretical viewpoint, and that a logical extension of this argument is that therefore Wagstaff's perspective is no more (nor less) demonstrated than, for example, Mesmer's or Braid's.

'Compliance' as written in stone

Although, for Wagstaff, hypnosis does not exist, compliance does. In the following demonstration I look at Wagstaff's performance in terms of his success in achieving this 'compliant' behaviour in his subjects. Wagstaff proposes that anyone can simulate hypnotic behaviour because what it really consists of is compliance and role enactment. However, in illustrating to his audience that hypnosis is a performance, Wagstaff is also presenting the presentation of hypnosis itself as a performance, in which the main actor is a social psychologist debunking hypnosis as a performance. Wagstaff's portrayal of trance as role-play involves a subject acting as though he were seven, eating an onion as if it were an apple, and pretending muscular rigidity, according to suggestion. At the end of the performance the subject then, prompted by Wagstaff, informs his audience that he was not hypnotized after all.

The following demonstration was transcribed from a television programme (Equinox) on hypnosis. The transcription notations, widely used in conversation analytic research, were developed by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984. See also appendix for details of transcription symbols).
SCENE 1: Acting a role

Starring, in order of appearance:-

Voice-over — as the unseen television interviewer, adopting the role of a spoof detective by speaking in a Raymond Chandler thriller/movie kind of voice.
A supporting cast of students — in the role of subjects and audience
Graham — in the role of a social psychologist
Mark — in the role of an 'ordinary student' and subject
Plus unseen television set operators
and unseen television audience
Plus Katie — as part of unseen audience and in the role of a discourse analyst
Plus unseen readers of this text.

The scene is a room, which looks like a small lecture theatre, in which a television programme on hypnosis (Equinox. Channel 4. Sunday, 16th October 1994) is being filmed. Graham Wagstaff (Graham), a social psychologist from the University of Liverpool, is about to demonstrate that hypnotic behaviour can be simulated, and is in fact role play. Wagstaff has already informed an (unseen) interviewer that people, when asked how hypnotized they felt after a trance induction, will have to reply in terms of being hypnotized. Wagstaff turns on a taperecorder and a recording of a voice, very similar to his own, gives hypnotic-like instructions of relaxation and muscle heaviness to the listening students.\(^\text{16}\) The students are seated in rows, while the social psychologist stands, near side of the camera and to the left side of the room, framed in the window. After the trance induction-like instructions, Wagstaff's voice is heard speaking over the scene of students opening their eyes), telling the television audience (not the students) what the students, and Wagstaff's subjects in general, are asked after a 'trance induction.'

1. Graham: So they wake \(\text{up} (1.2)\) and then we ask them \(0.2\).
2. How many people \(0.4\) feel \(0.8\) that they were acting a role \(0.8\).
3. Rather than in a real trance.

\((\text{Film cut and edited here})\).

\(^{16}\) Wagstaff (1981: 31), in describing the procedure of hypnotic trance inductions states that ' in terms of compliance there is no a priori reason for assuming that taped inductions will be any less effective.'
((In the next scene Graham is shown, in the lecture room, addressing the students while reading from notes on the table at the front of the room.))

4. Graham: We're interested in knowing how many people believe how many people feel that they weren't in a real trance state rather they just felt very relaxed and were thinking along with the suggestions. So could you please put your hand up if you felt you weren't actually in a real trance you were just very relaxed and thinking along with what was going on?

11. ((Voice-over: Most of the students confess they were never in a trance no hypnotism no trance no case to answer.))

* 

What is immediately striking about the above performance is that, although Wagstaff is a social psychologist, discussing what hypnosis really is from a social psychological perspective, his demonstration is not a study, but a set up and staged fait accompli, with the audience as much his stooges (in that we have to go along with his results), as his subjects. Wagstaff has already decided what hypnosis is, and is now going through the motions of illustrating it as a way of dramatizing his point. Therefore the television audience are not informed of various factors which may have influenced his (televised) results. They are not told whether Wagstaff's student subjects are from the University of Liverpool, to what extent they might be familiar with Wagstaff's views on hypnosis as compliance, or whether they were primed beforehand. In contrast, if this were one of Wagstaff's experimental studies which he implies have followed a set procedure (see below), it would begin with a hypothesis, involving, for example, control and experimental groups. Independent variables, manipulated by the controllers, would include such influential factors as the presence of the students as Wagstaff explains his theoretical perspective to Equinox interviewer, the presence of the camera, as, for example, a motivating factor in Mark eating his apple/onion with such alacrity (see scene 3, below), and the wording of the questions. In the televised performance Wagstaff talks as a social psychologist without having to display his credibility as a scientist through the rigours of his methods (as he would have to do for a different kind of audience, at, for
example, an academic conference). This is, right from the beginning of the programme, a performance for the general public, in which Wagstaff is going to present his case as proven. As the voice-over states, conveying the drama of a trial in which the students ‘confess’ (line 11) to the truth, there is no case to answer. As far as Wagstaff is concerned there is no hypnosis, and this is what he shows.

In asking how many people felt that they were just very relaxed and imagining along with the suggestions rather than being in a real trance (lines 5-8), Wagstaff has, in accordance with his own reasoning, worded his question in terms of an expected response. As Wagstaff states, in his interview with Equinox (1994),

> If you simply say to somebody, “How hypnotized did you feel?” they’ll have to report that they were hypnotized because what other opportunity have you given them to explain their experiences....

When you give them an opportunity to say “I was relaxed, imagining, or role enacting, then they can take that opportunity.

Wagstaff suggests that people’s verbal responses in talking about their experiences of hypnosis are governed by the opportunities allowed by the question. This highlights the way that the effects of Wagstaff’s own questioning are inextricably linked with the subjects’ replies (Edwards, in press; Levinson, 1983), and how when he asks the students whether they were just very relaxed and thinking along with what was going on (lines 8-9), he sets guidelines for how they might be expected to respond, using comparisons between real trance and just relaxation. Bearing in mind that the students are subjects taking part in a filmed debunking of hypnosis, and that Wagstaff’s interpretation of hypnotic responses is that subjects role enact hypnotic behaviour, and comply according to the social and individual expectations of the situation, the students’ responses are not surprising, nor is the voice-over interpretation of such responses. The *tu quoque* turn upon Wagstaff’s perspective is to suggest that the students’ responses to
Wagstaff’s suggestions are influenced by the expectations of that situation. Furthermore, in looking at the expectations surrounding the televised programme, I would suggest that there are additional ‘factors’ which will also affect just how the interactants (the social psychologist, television interviewer, students and individual ‘hypnotic’ subject) will behave in that situation.

**Wait a minute, what’s all this stuff about ‘factors’ (causes, influences, variables...)?**

Oh no, not...

*the very welcome presence of a reflexive next turn — turning up just in time to get you out of a tricky situation? Yes, that’s me.*

What tricky situation?

You mean you hadn’t noticed that you were beginning to write like a cognitive-social psychologist?

*It’s called ‘joining the patient,’ by echoing the subject’s language you join him in his world and speak through him, as it were.*

**Who said that?**

Look! Can I get on here?

- Wagstaff’s role is as an expert, appearing on television to inform the audience of what hypnosis really is. He speaks with the authority of a person who knows his topic well enough to lecture on it, heard both in his diction as he speaks as though he were lecturing — clearly and with emphatic rhythm (see underlining in transcription examples) — and in his rhetoric as a social scientist. This can be seen in his initial address, as he speaks of questioning subjects as if it is a known procedure which will follow experimental ‘trance inductions.’ In his use of the present tense (line 1) he scripts people ‘waking up’ and being asked if they were acting a role as a regular occurrence (Edwards, 1994). The present tense verb in ‘we ask’ signals repetition, implying that this is a procedure, as in empirical studies, in which there is a standard practice to follow, with data and analysis resulting in evidence about the research topic. Wagstaff’s use of ‘we’ reinforces the procedure as a scientific practice, and his perspective as a theoretical viewpoint which has credence in the social sciences. He is not a lone figure but a spokesperson for the truth about ‘hypnosis.’
This display of expertise suggests that social psychology has the answer to what hypnosis really is. This is a likely factor in influencing how the participating students (whether they are budding social psychologists or not) will respond to the ‘trance induction.’ There would be a danger, for example, for students who said that they were hypnotized, of being seen (not just by those taking part in the demonstration, but by millions of viewers) as a Paul McKenna kind of subject, who barks like a dog when told to do so, and who thinks that hypnosis is a real state. The embarrassment of such behaviour in this situation would be because this is not a Paul McKenna demonstration of people doing amazing things, but a Graham Wagstaff demonstration of people acting out roles. In aligning with Wagstaff, and agreeing that they were not hypnotized, the students show that they have got the right answer, and behave as expected in this particular situation.

Wagstaff does not ask the students whether they were in trance or not. He asks how many people felt as if they weren’t in ‘a real trance’ (lines 3, 5 & 8), and in doing so provides an opportunity for the students to evaluate their experience as not a real trance. Real trance is a strong description, which, left undefined by Wagstaff, becomes an arbitrary term, part of a rhetorical contrast that invokes what the students might have felt instead. This kind of questioning (sanctioned in courtrooms as ‘leading the witness’) is followed by suggestions that they might have been ‘just very relaxed’ (lines 5-6 & 8), ‘thinking along’ (lines 6 & 8), and ‘imagining’ (line 6), and are all suitably vague descriptions with which to compare ‘real trance.’ The words offered as an interpretation of their possible experiences, invite the students to go along with Wagstaff, and to agree that their responses were ‘just relaxation.’ What has been constituted as hypnotic muscle heaviness (see above), can also be reconstituted as just relaxation.

The students’ responses are not only an indication of the validity of Wagstaff’s perspective, but are constituted by Wagstaff’s perspective. That is, how the students are expected to behave, and cued to describe their experiences, are provided for within the demonstration. This televised performance has been set up to produce a
right answer, an affirmation that Wagstaff is correct, and therefore allows little opportunity for students to stand up and declare that actually they were in a real trance after all.

*

SCENE 2: Simulating simulating (etc.) hypnosis

*The film has been cut and edited, and now shows Wagstaff with a student, standing in front of the camera.*

12. Graham: (you) take a selat, Ma rk
13. (3.0) ((Mark sits down))
14. Mark is going to simulate hypnosis (1.2) .hh and I should
15. emphasise that this is totally unrehearsed (1.6)
16. Mark is just an ordinary student he's not an actor (1.0)
17. ehum and this is completely unrehearsed (1.0)
18. So I want to give you these instructions (0.6)
19. >Are you ready< then Mark=
20. Mark: =right=
21. Graham: .hhh <What I want you to do> (1.0) is simulate the behaviour of an <excellent hypnotic subject> (1.0) ((Mark nods his head))
22. Mark: °(o)kay=
23. Graham: =I'm not going to tell you how to do it>
24. (1.0)
25. but most people are able to do this

((It's not clear whether the film is continuous or cut here, but at this point in the demonstration Mark closes his eyes))

*
An analysis of scene 2, in which Mark is informed that Graham wants him to simulate an excellent hypnotic subject, suggests how the unequal division of control and authority defined by the situation ensures that Mark will be the one who does as he is told, and Graham will be the one who does the telling. After directing Mark to take a seat, Graham informs the audience of what it is that Mark is going to do, and in doing so displays himself as the expert and Mark as the stooge, in a demonstration by Graham for the television audience. Bearing in mind that Graham stresses that this demonstration is totally (line 15), completely (line 19), unrehearsed (lines 15 & 19), when Graham tells the audience that Mark is going to simulate hypnosis (line 14), he leaves little room for resistance. Mark, who has not been prewarned, is now told exactly how he is to behave in this performance. He is informed, in front of an expectant audience (perhaps of students, camera and sound technicians, and, of course, the general public who will watch this programme), by an authority on how hypnosis can be simulated by ordinary people, that he will now simulate hypnosis. Despite the extraordinariness of the situation—a performance simulating hypnosis in front of television cameras, Graham draws attention to how ordinary his subject is, just an ordinary student, not an actor, and emphasizes that the demonstration is completely unrehearsed (lines 15 & 19). The unrehearsed quality of the demonstration implies that what happens next will be a simulation, but it will be a real one, not one rehearsed and acted by an actor. This makes a neat rhetorical distinction between a simulation which might be rehearsed, staged and acted (and as such untrustworthy), and a spontaneous, unrehearsed simulation. Mark’s performance of hypnosis is to be believed because it is a genuine simulation, not an acted one!

Mark responds to Graham’s directives with quiet acquiescence. When asked if he is ready for Graham’s instructions he replies immediately with ‘right’ (line 24). Graham then states, this time to Mark, that he wants Mark to simulate the behaviour of an excellent hypnotic subject. There is a brief pause, before Mark nods his head and says ‘okay’ (line 28), and Graham elaborates on his request. He then tells Mark that he is not going to tell him how to simulate this behaviour, but most people are able to do this.\footnote{I am reminded of Ericksonian trance inductions, in which the hypnotist assumes a perspective of ‘trusting the unconscious’ (see chapter seven) in which the client knows what he is doing. For example, one of Havens & Walters’s (1989: 68) Ericksonian trance inductions suggests that the therapist say to the listening client ‘Now as you sit there, with your eyes closed, and begin to drift into trance, \textit{in your own way}, in your own time, you can take your time to allow that}
Implicit within this are instructions on exactly how Graham wants Mark to respond. The behaviour of an excellent hypnotic subject, from this perspective, will be of the kind which illustrates Graham’s point. Furthermore, there is also a challenge to Mark to respond properly. His general knowledge (rather than any specialized reading or course of study) is a sufficient and proper basis to act on — ‘most people are able to do this’ (line 31). Yet, if Mark fails to simulate hypnosis like an excellent hypnotic subject it is not because Graham was wrong after all, but because Mark, unlike most people, did not know enough about hypnosis to perform it adequately. This gives Mark a clear guide on how he is expected to behave, and structures his compliant behaviour throughout the performance.

* 

In a demonstration resembling hypnotic age regression, Graham suggests that Mark will get younger and younger with each count. Graham counts backwards until he gets to seven, and Mark speaks in a wee small voice as if he were a seven year old boy at school. He says that he is outside in the playground with his friends, Herb and Seed. At this point the film may have been cut. In the next frame Graham is handing Mark a round apple-sized object.

SCENE 3: Eating the apple/onion

74. ((Graham places an apple-sized object in Mark’s hand))
75. Graham: Now take (0.1) a nice (.) juicy bite,
76. (1.0)
77. and tell [me what it tastes like.
78. [ ((Mark bites object (3.8) — sound of crunching))
79. Graham: >Does it taste good?
80. ((Mark nods his head and continues munching))

letting go to occur’ (added emphasis). Erickson (Erickson, Rossi and Rossi, 1976: 137-8), in his demonstration of unconscious learning in hypnotic trance inductions suggests to his two hypnotic subjects ‘[a]nd you both realize thoroughly that the hypnotic state is not really induced by me but by yourselves. (Pause). And H saw S do something with her eyelids, and then he repeated it. And S, in watching H, in turn repeated what H did, and she went into trance.’

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81. Mark: "Mm" ((tiny pause in munching before continuing to munch))
82. Graham: Is it sweet,=
83. Mark: =Mm.
84. ((1.0))
85. ((Mark takes another bite of the apple-sized object. The camera zooms in to close up on Mark's face))
86. ((5.0))
87. Graham: It's not at all sour.
88. ((Mark shakes his head))
89. Graham: It's a nice juicy red apple.
90. ((2.6))
91. >Is it one of the best you've tasted?=
92. Mark: =Mm (1.0) >it's good.<= ((Mark brings the object towards his mouth))
93. Graham: =that's fine you don't n[eed any more M]ark,
94. ((Mark biting the object))
95. Mark: "mm"
96. Graham: >I can see you want to eat the wh[ole thing] you're finding it so delicious;=
97. Mark: =Mm.
98. ((4.0) — Mark continues munching))

* 

The above scene, although a proposed simulation of hypnosis, looks very like any staged performance of hypnosis. Mark, sitting with his eyes closed, now, at Graham's suggestion, takes a nice juicy bite (line 75) of a pretend apple. The television audience are likely to be aware, as they watch this, that this is not a real apple but an onion, for two reasons. First, the voice-over interviewer has already stated, at the beginning of Graham's demonstration with the students, that, 'with the help of an onion, two chairs, and a roomful of students' Graham is going to show us the truth about hypnosis. Second, getting a subject to eat an onion while thinking it is an apple, is a familiar part of a stage hypnotist's demonstration of hypnosis. Mark, however, still has his eyes closed, and is not told that Graham has just placed an onion in his hand. He therefore requires some orientation to how the object should be responded to. 'A nice juicy bite' (line 75) informs Mark that the object is not only edible, but also that he can treat it as if it were a juicy kind of fruit, like an apple (raw onions are not usually described as juicy, or the
type of thing one can take a nice bite of). Graham encourages Mark to continue treating the onion as if it were an apple by asking whether it tastes good (line 79), if it is sweet (line 82), if it is not at all sour (line 88). In doing so Graham can both monitor Mark's responses, and display the pretence of treating the onion like an apple.

Graham's questions, and the subject's positive response, signal the success of the pretence, culminating in Graham stating that this is a nice, juicy red apple that Mark is eating, one of the best that he has tasted (lines 90-92). Mark goes along with this beautifully, continuing to munch enthusiastically, and even taking another bite and eating at the point where Graham tells him that he doesn't need any more (lines 94-95). In stating that he can see that Mark wants to eat the whole thing, he is finding it so delicious (lines 97-98), Graham shows how deeply entranced or compliant the subject is — like stage hypnosis, where the fun is in how people go overboard on the hypnotist's instructions, not just by getting into it, but by going further than asked. In this extract both Graham and Mark are acting their roles of hypnotist and hypnotic subject so successfully that someone switching their television on at this point could be forgiven for thinking that this is an example of hypnotic phenomenon, rather than a performance set up in order to debunk hypnosis. It might even be said (and indeed it is, see lines 169-170) that Mark was actually hypnotized after all.

* 

The film is cut and edited here Following on from the onion eating scene is Graham's 'human plank' demonstration, in which Graham suggests that Mark's muscles have become rigid. With the help of two men Graham then lifts Mark onto the top support of two metal framed chairs. The top of the back rest of one chair is under Mark's shoulders. The top of the other chair is beneath Mark's knees. A third chair is placed in the middle and a little to the side. It offers no physical support. Graham tells Mark that he is 'hypnotized and rigid.' Graham then sits on Mark's chest and asks someone to take away the middle chair. Graham informs his audience that Mark can support his weight because he is so 'rigid and hypnotized..' Mark is then awoken from the simulated trance by Graham counting forwards, suggesting that Mark is wide awake
and in a good mood. He asks Mark if he can remember anything that has just happened to him. Mark shakes his head and says no.

SCENE 4: Fulfilling expectations

149. Graham: Um, (,) did you actually try not to remember anything (,) Mark.
150. (1.0)
151. Mark: No I wasn’t =I was just um (1.0) >’know you think you see things
152. like Paul McKenna [(and so on)]
153. Graham: [Yes. ]
154. Mark: and they never remember anything so I assumed I didn’t have to
155. remember anything either.<
156. (0.7)
157. Graham: .hh Right so you assumed you didn’t have to remember anything
158. yes.:.
159. Mark: [I thought that’s what you’re supposed to do.=
160. Graham: =Yeh. So in other words, what Mark was doing (,) h was fulfilling
161. the expectations, of the role of the hypnotized subject. h What it
162. also demonstrates, (,) <is that m>ost people have an id>ea> of what a
163. hypnotic subject is supposed to beh>ave like.
164. (1.0)
165. .hh So in other words, s- some of the more strange behaviours are quite
166. commonly known to us they’re they’re (0.8) .hh they’re part of our culture.
167. We all know what a hypnotic subject is supposed to behave like.
168. .hh Therefore we don’t need to actually train people.

* 

Graham begins this scene (as cut and edited by Equinox ) by asking Mark ‘did you actually try not to remember anything’ (line 149). This is a difficult question to understand immediately, and in Mark’s response we can see how he works to unpack it, in his hesitation, and in his reply. His response, like Graham’s question, is constituted by and indexical of the situation, and attends to the ‘trance’ in terms of Graham’s topic, expectations about stage hypnosis. After Graham has asked Mark the question, and Mark could begin to reply from any point after ‘anything.’ there is a brief pause
before Graham says Mark’s name. There follows another, longer pause, and then Mark says ‘no I wasn’t. I was just um’ followed by a further pause (line 151). This gives Mark time, while showing that he is answering the question, to work on his response. That he is on the right track, as far as Graham is concerned, is signalled in Graham’s encouragement as soon as Paul McKenna is mentioned (lines 152-3). This is absolutely consistent with the social psychologist’s explanation of hypnotic behaviour, and how it is influenced by social expectations. Paul McKenna type shows treat hypnosis as if it were an amazing phenomenon, and audiences watching such performances are influenced into expecting that this is how people should behave in trance. Graham shows his affinity with Mark’s description by reiterating what Mark has said, and then reformulating his response in terms of social psychology (lines 160-8).

In formulating remembering as something that never (line 154) happens, Mark gives a neat gloss on a consistent feature of stage hypnosis. Not only does this support his performance as an excellent hypnotic subject, imitating what he has seen in stage shows, as a regular feature of trance, he is also, like a stooge in a stage duet, feeding the main man his lines. Graham signals encouragement to what Mark is saying about Paul McKenna type shows with ‘yes (line 153). He then says ‘right’ (line 157), reiterates Mark’s explanation, and says ‘yes’ as he concludes. Before he has finished speaking Mark comes in with a second affirmation that this is the kind of thing he assumed hypnotic subjects did (line 159), and Graham says ‘Yeh’ again (line 160). The explanation that what Mark has seen on Paul McKenna type shows has led him to assume that that is what hypnotized subjects do is emphasized thrice, by Mark, then by Graham, then by Mark again, before Graham reformulates it in terms of social expectations. As he does this he speaks to the audience, informing them of what Mark was doing.

So, in other words, what Mark was doing was fulfilling the expectations of the role of the hypnotized subject. What it also demonstrates is that most people have an idea of what a hypnotic subject is supposed to behave like (lines 160-163).
In reformulating Mark’s explanation, Graham speaks as a social psychologist, generalizing what Mark has said into something that can be applied in every hypnotic situation. Mark’s *simulation* of the behaviour of an excellent hypnotic subject, coupled with his gloss on stage shows, becomes evidence that this is what people do as subjects in real stage shows, they fulfil the expectations of the role of a hypnotized subject. This is a truly successful performance, for not only has Mark complied with Graham’s directive that he simulate the behaviour of an excellent hypnotic subject, he has also done an excellent job of responding to Graham’s cues and thus coming up with the right answers. Graham draws the required response out of Mark in much the same way that Socrates, in the *Meno* (Plato, 1956), uses the responses of the (unnamed) slaveboy to illustrate his point. Socrates is intent on showing Meno that various aspects of knowledge are innate, and merely require ‘awakening’ through prompting. In order to demonstrate this he uses Meno’s slave boy to show that, although the boy is apparently ignorant of the topic under discussion, he can be *reminded* of his pre-existing knowledge, through careful questioning. In this example the philosopher has drawn a geometrical diagram in the sand and is trying to elicit Pythagoras’s theorem out of the boy.

Socrates: How big is this figure then?
Boy: Eight feet.
Socrates: On what base?
Boy: This one.
Socrates: The line which goes from corner to corner of the square of four feet?
Boy: Yes.
Socrates: The technical name for it is ‘diagonal’; so if we use that name, it is your personal opinion that the square on the diagonal of the original square is double its area.
Boy: That is so, Socrates.

(Plato,1956: 137)
However, rather than taking the above dialogue — which ends with the boy agreeing that it is his personal opinion that the square on the diagonal of the original square is double its area — as proof that Socrates is right, and that the boy’s innate knowledge of Pythagoras’s theorem has been awakened and subtly drawn out of him, it could be said that Socrates has provided the answers himself, within his own questioning (Edwards, in press; see also chapter 3 of Billig et al, 1988). The slave boy’s replies are minimal, in comparison to Socrates’s elaborate reformulation of the boy’s answer, as he speaks through the slave boy to address Meno, and to emphasise his point. Graham speaks through Mark, prompting and guiding until he is able to address the audience with a reformulation which proves his point. This is followed by a second reformulation which sums up the purpose of the performance. ‘So in other words.’ (line 160), he says again, still addressing the audience, ‘we all know what a hypnotic subject is supposed to behave like’ (line 167). Graham has emphasized, through his subject’s responses, that we all know how a hypnotic subject is supposed to behave. This knowledge influences how we will subsequently behave in hypnotic situations. Therefore, from this perspective there is no such thing as hypnosis, it has been re-explained as compliant behaviour.

*  

SCENE 5: Spinning lines

169. ((Voice-over: Don’t spin me a line (0.8) I think he gave the
170. kid the evil eye< (0.8) He was just hypnotized.))
171. (2.0)
172. Graham: hh That he was just hypnos-well (. ) d’you think you were
173. hypnotized, Mark?
174. Mark: No I wasn’t hypnotized at all hhhhh ((laughs quietly))
175. Graham: That’s the best answer to that one.

The performance concludes with a brief scene in which the voice-over pretends opposition, by stating that Mark was just hypnotized. What this suggests is that what Graham and Mark did looked like hypnosis, and therefore maybe was hypnosis after all. However, although it might seem as though the voice-over, in his spoof detective role,
has not been convinced by the performance, what he says reiterates Graham’s point for him. What is recognized as hypnosis is what Mark and Graham have just demonstrated. Eating onions as if they were apples, regressing to childhood, or not remembering anything after trance are all the kinds of things that people do in hypnotic situations. If this looked the same as a Paul McKenna’s act then Graham has been successful in showing how easily such behaviour can be imitated.

**The best answer**

This chapter has been concerned with how descriptions of hypnosis as mind control, or social roles governed by expectations, work rhetorically within textual and televised discussions on hypnosis, and how the author/speaker/hypnotist is constituted as adventurous, experienced, qualified, expert, in descriptions of what hypnosis is.

By taking a reflexive turn on Wagstaff’s analysis, that is by applying the principles of his social psychological analysis to his own practice, I suggest that the behaviour of Wagstaff’s subjects does more than illustrate his claim that compliance is a feature of the hypnotic situation (Wagstaff, 1981). Such responses are produced by Wagstaff’s theoretical perspective. In an analysis of the social psychologist’s and experimental subject’s interaction as they simulate hypnosis, I suggest ways in which the right responses to Wagstaff’s directives are produced and maintained, and to what effect. The implications of this story, is that Wagstaff has successfully illustrated compliance through the compliance of his subjects, role playing students taking part in a demonstration debunking hypnosis. This brings a symmetry to versions of hypnosis, with Wagstaff, like McKenna, like Mesmer, like Braid, getting his subjects to respond according to his suggestions. Now, just as Wagstaff complies with the discipline of a social scientific analysis, in treating hypnotic behaviour as influenced by social expectations, so this thesis complies with certain expectations about the kind of analysis that I can do and still remain within the social sciences department. In the final chapter...

*Is that it? Is that the reflexive punch-line? Is that the best you can do? Don’t harangue me. What’s wrong with it? Come on! This reflexive footnoting (Sleepstone, this thesis) is okay up to a point, but it’s not exactly cutting edge stuff, is it? I mean, does saying ‘tu quoque*
et me quoque’ make your analysis radically reflexive? I think not. You may be doing a tu quoque on Wagstaff, which is indeed a reflexive move, but it is one directed at others (tu) rather than oneself. Stating ‘me too’ doesn’t help either, since it tells us nothing about how you managed to bring off that tu quoque on Wagstaff. Now, that would be reflexivity. That would be the best answer yet.

* 

The ALF of this chapter (excluding textual interruptions and poetic introductions) is a Jeffersonian transcription, of the kind frequently used in conversation analysis (CA). CA transcription notations are used as a way of providing details about the participants’ talk, such as emphasis, intonation, pauses, hesitations. The notation symbols themselves are a form of analysis, requiring that the transcriber decide, for example, what kind of speech is to taken as normal, when marking intonation (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Ochs, 1979). By using such conventions in a transcription of Wagstaff’s demonstration, I signal a CA perspective, in which talk is treated as performative of social actions and interaction-oriented, rather than, say, as revelatory about mind or world (Edwards, in press). The ALF transcription highlights the way that the interaction between Graham and Mark, in a televised demonstration debunking hypnosis, is turned into ‘data’ for my own argument. In turning this talk into data, I transform Wagstaff’s work into the phenomenon under analysis, rather than an analysis which can work on the same level as my own. My own story of Wagstaff’s demonstration thus becomes the interpretative framework for his social psychological perspective — looking, not through a window on the world on ‘hypnosis,’ but at the relevance of talk as action.

* 

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CHAPTER NINE

THE SPIRALLING TRANSCRIPTS: ‘Negotiating’ Trance

[Notes to chapter nine:-

What I need to do, to draw this thesis to a neat conclusion, with all the topics spiralling together, is to return to the Ericksonian ‘join the patient’ approach I wrote about in chapter seven, and to suggest that what has been happening throughout this thesis is a kind of ‘join the reader’ textual therapy. By bringing the reader into the thesis as the vital respondent who turns mere words into therapy, I am suggesting that although, of course, there are a variety of possible readings, in unconsciously responding to the hypnotic suggestions of this text, the reader has been able to access a deeper understanding of trance talk. A problem with making this explicit, either in the introduction to my thesis or in introducing this final chapter, is that, like ‘authoritarian’ suggestions in hypnosis, by telling the reader that something is going to happen I can create conditions for resistance. What would be better then is if, in my final conclusion, I state that embedded suggestions have been woven throughout this thesis, not merely in Sleepstone’s sample trances but in the overall fabric of the text, which, like Erickson’s story of the tomato plants, have been guiding the reader to a particular therapeutic resolve without him realizing that he is being guided. Until the end, of course, when I point out that any therapeutic changes that the reader has begun to notice will have been brought about through unconscious learning — a positive reader-reaction to a therapeutic text.

*** N.B. Delete this paragraph.]

Hypnotherapy: Your questions answered.

What is hypnosis? A state of relaxation and concentration with a heightened awareness induced by suggestion.

Are there some people who cannot be hypnotised? No,
although the degree varies from person to person.

Are drugs or tablets used? No.

Shall I be aware of what is happening during hypnosis? Yes.

So I am not asleep then? No, but you are extremely relaxed.

Is there any cause for concern? None whatsoever, hypnosis is a natural aid.

---

Hypnotherapy: Your questions to this thesis answered

What is hypnosis? Hypnosis is a state of consciousness 'in which the most striking characteristic is the subject's increased susceptibility to suggestion' — achieved using 'words which fix the subject's attention to their rhythmic sound' [(Snyder, 1930: 37) see chapter three of this thesis]. Hypnosis is potentially poetic. Poetry is potentially hypnotic.

Yes. But what is it really? Who said that? You're not supposed to answer back, you are a hypothetical reader who asks what I ask, in this subtle reflexive parody of questions and answers about hypnosis.

It's the reflexive next turn, of course, and I'm asking you what hypnosis is really? [impatiently] Hypnosis is a social practice, constructed rhetorically within talk, both therapeutic and mundane, and within textual descriptions.

Is that negotiable? Yes, of course.

Can any reader of your text be hypnotised? [cautiously] Yes.

Have you been in amongst my notes?

[ignoring the question] Is that negotiable? [testily] Yes — the degree to which the text entrances is reliant upon the reader's
ability to be drawn into alternative realms of understanding, and the author's ability to persuade the reader that this is a worthwhile journey.

**Are any tablets used?** Nothing in stone.

**Shall I be aware of what is happening during this thesis?** Yes, my voice will go with you.

**But, therapeutically, will I really be aware?** On what level of consciousness? Are you aware of your left ear?

Well, I am now. Don't be so touchy. What happens if I don't want to respond hypnotically? In therapeutic terms, if you were a therapy client, I could construct this as resistance to change. Denial.

So, although you are telling me that hypnosis is a negotiated process, you are also telling me that if I am not entranced by your text I am resisting what is really there? [uneasily] Well, it isn't that the text is intrinsically hypnotic, it's the supporting discussion and your subsequent response that make it so.

I don't think I like being told how to respond to your text. I don't think, on top of reading your thesis, I should have the added burden of worrying whether I'm in trance or not.

(3.0)

So I am not asleep then?

(5.4)

Hello?

* 

Is there any cause for concern?

She's gone, I can stop speaking emphatically now. Just lifted her hands from the computer keys, got up from the swivel chair and went downstairs. I can hear her rummaging in the biscuit tin and muttering. I think maybe I hit on a sensitive issue by peeking at her notes, and then pointing out her complicity. But this questions the whole
notion of hypnosis as negotiation if she’s already got a therapeutic plan about what is supposed to happen, to the client or the reader, which she then sets in motion, while stating that the response is negotiable. This looks to me less of a negotiation and more of an author’s directive. And all this stuff about ‘joining the patient,’ embedded suggestions and therapeutic resolve! I mean, while that may be perfectly acceptable in a therapy session, this is a thesis on constructions of hypnosis, not on therapeutic interventions per se, nor on therapies for the reader. Furthermore, it may be all right to invite a reader into the text in principle, as a way of displaying the multiplicity of readings in a single text, but to suggest that while the reader is involved in the act of interpretation he will also undergo some kind of therapeutic change is not only inconsistently realist, it is also pushing the idea of ALFs just too far. Readers (and I elect to speak for all of you here) will not take kindly to this sort of intrusive interference, regardless of whether it could possibly happen or not. We do not like the author’s implication that we could do with some therapy, either through embedded suggestions (such as clarity of vision) or in the teachings of our own ‘wise’ unconscious (as in our responses). As the reflexive next turn it is my duty to interrupt at random points in this thesis, to stave off outside voice interception as long as possible (it is now too late), and to maintain the credibility of a reflexive thesis. Let’s see if I can get enough of this chapter sorted out before she gets back from the biscuit tin, in order to forestall further threats of textual trances, and to rescue her from the precarious edge of the relativist’s bottom line (Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, 1995). Hello, what’s happening to my emphasis? And how did all these crumbs get on the carpet?

Haven’t you read chapter one, and its ‘reflexion’ yet?

Has it been written?

Oh no! Not the ‘having your cake and eating it reflexivity’ sketch.

Biscuits. We’ve used up all of the cake. Now, can I get on and finish my thesis without any more textual interference please?

*
Versions of hypnosis

This thesis has looked at ways in which what hypnosis is gets constituted by the speaker/author in, for example, historiographies, clinical manuals, descriptions of Ericksonian therapy, media reports, and social psychology textbooks. This (my) version of hypnosis — that hypnosis is a social construction, a discursive practice — is further exemplified in an analysis of a 'trance induction' performed to illustrate hypnosis as compliant behaviour (see chapter eight), and a poetic trance induction (see below). In the extract taken from an advertising leaflet entitled 'Hypnotherapy: Your Questions Answered' (see above), 'what hypnosis is' is the kind of thing that can be explained in a straightforward way, in terms of questions and answers. Hypnosis is conveyed as safe, simple, and available for anyone to experience (and free from any hint of mind control — unlike the story of Svengali, or the newspaper reporter's sensationalised account, see chapter eight).

A description of the hypnotic effects of poetic rhythm and powerful imagery has been the focus of discussions of hypnotic poetry and poetic hypnosis (e.g., Silber, 1980; Snyder, 1930. See chapter three of this thesis), whereas in a manual for medical practitioners and clinicians (Cheek and LeCron, 1968) hypnosis is described in terms of a clinical list of detailed 'trance phenomena' for the practitioner to refer to, to ascertain the patient's level of trance (see chapter five of this thesis). Peter Brown's (1991) proposal that the human brain is naturally hypnotic gives us a version of trance that is part of everyday human life (see chapter five). This perspective traces human evolution from its beginnings, as face-to-face communication, through oral cultures and the poet's role in relating memorable tales, and thus to the therapeutic metaphors used by modern hypnotists (including Erickson). In descriptions of Erickson's use of metaphoric imagery and indirect suggestions, it is assumed (and proposed) that the mind can be divided into a 'brilliant' unconscious (e.g., Havens, 1985: 73), and a potentially resistant consciousness (Erickson et al, 1976). Indirect suggestions are designed to bypass the interfering conscious mind, and are therefore more likely to be therapeutically effective. In a meta-analysis of Erickson's 'teaching tales,' Sidney Rosen (1982) looks at the effectiveness of Erickson's communication with the unconscious (see chapter seven of this thesis) in a story of Erickson's interaction with a farmer who does not want to buy books from the hypnotist, while André Weitzenhoffer (1976) describes in detail how he found himself
responding unconsciously to Erickson’s indirect, non verbal suggestions over the breakfast table.

My own tale of hypnosis is constituted by the analysis; in ‘showing the ways,’ illustrating, supporting, relativizing and reflecting upon constructed versions, I offer a version of hypnosis which is linked with poetry, and the reflexive construction of a doctoral thesis. On pages 221-222 (this chapter) the reflexive next turn reminds us that, of course, my own description of hypnosis is also negotiable....

I resent that! I resent the way that you have just re-used my vehement protestations about negotiation in order to support your own point that descriptions of hypnosis are negotiable.

*** N.B. Delete this reflexive intrusion.

..and therefore invites the reader to participate in the ‘deconstruction’ of the subject through various rehearsals of trance.

Spiralling constructions

Poetry has been used, in this thesis, to illustrate the textual construction of its own, and that of others, claims to knowledge. Its unusual presence in a social science text requires explanation, and as such highlights what is more usually taken for granted and treated as unproblematic in research. The poems, in the various sections of this thesis, have drawn together, summarized, and parodied the themes of its chapters, with *Spiralling Bird* (chapter four) representing the themes of the thesis as a whole. *Spiralling Bird* exemplifies the construction of a doctoral thesis, the construction of a poem, the construction of a hypnotic poem, the construction of therapy, and now, turning up for the final recital, the construction of hypnosis. Its place, in this concluding chapter, gives another spiral turn on hypnosis as a version, with the interactants co-constructing hypnosis in a session which has been arranged to include poetry in some form or other. The last rehearsal of this thesis is performed by Ezra Driftworthy, as a therapy client, and Katie MacMillan, as a hypnotist, in which the participants attend to the unusual presence of poetry in a therapy session by negotiating what the expected trance induction is to consist of. Chapter three of this thesis enacts the creation of a
trance inducing poem, written in response to Ezra’s request to Katie to have poetry included in his next therapy session. What is to be regarded as poetic, hypnotic, hypnotically poetic, or poetically trance-inducing, is problematized by the trial and error negotiations of MacMillan and Evangeline Scribbler (as poet), with the results forming chapter four in its entirety (and the analytical data for this chapter). The poem’s unusual presence in a social science thesis highlights — in the need to argue a credible case for its existence — the construction of a doctoral dissertation. The poem’s unusual presence in a hypnotherapy session highlights — in the way that the participants check out what this session is to be (hypnosis, or poetry reading) — the co-construction of hypnosis.

The *Spiralling Bird* poem

The following extract is transcribed from the therapy session which followed Ezra’s request for poetry, in which the poem, *Spiralling Bird*, is introduced as a therapeutic trance induction. Extract 1:9 begins about fifteen minutes into the meeting. Ezra has just reflected on his therapy so far, summarizing how he is feeling, and how he thinks he has changed. Immediately prior to Extract 1, Ezra says that with the therapeutic success they’ve had so far, it seems perfectly logical that they should continue to have more. This sets an optimistic tone for the session, and displays the client as open to whatever therapeutic intervention that might come next. Katie then tells Ezra that she is going to read her poem (see appendix for notes on transcription conventions).

*Spiralling Bird Data*

**Extract 1:9**

[SB. 5.10.93. A257].

1 Katie:- °Absolutely.°

2 (0.4)

3 >Now I'm going to read you my poem<

4 (0.8)

5 um (3.6) ((sounds of something being moved))

6 going to insist that you listen h
(( begins to laugh while speaking)) to:

my: poem hu huh

(.)

since [I wrote it for you.

Ezra:-

[↑yes: ↑you don’t ↑have to insist.

(1.0)

In line 1 the therapist (Katie) closes the topic of the client’s (Ezra) previous summary with her agreement rounding off his formulation of his therapeutic success so far, and signalling both her turn in the talk and the beginning of a new topic (cf. Sacks [1992] on turns and topic shifts, and Schiffrin [1987] on the function of discourse markers). Katie then announces that she is going to read her poem (line 3), emphasising that what is news is when (‘now’) and what (‘read’) (see Halliday [1967] on intonation as a signal of what is ‘new’ and what is ‘given’ information. See also Edwards [in press]). The lack of emphasis on ‘poem’ marks its status as ‘given’ information, signalling that the subject of the poem is being treated as shared knowledge.

In an analysis of the use of ‘given’ information, Derek Edwards (in press) looks at how the implication of common knowledge works rhetorically. For example, in Bill Beaumont’s endorsement of Shredded Wheat, in a recent television advertisement, the shared information is that he is a long-term Shredded Wheat eater (ibid: chapter five). In endorsing Shredded Wheat, an issue of ‘stake’ (that Beaumont is getting paid for the advertisement) could threaten to undermine his credibility as a speaker (Edwards and Potter, 1992). This is avoided by treating as ‘given’ the information that Beaumont ate Shredded Wheat long before the making of the television advert (‘In those days I never really thought about why I ate Shredded Wheat’). In Ezra and Katie’s therapy session the poem, in being treated by the hypnotist as ‘given,’ is like an Ericksonian ‘indirect suggestion’ (see below). This works to insert the poem in the therapy session as an agreed presence (regardless of whether it has been explicitly agreed or not), and in doing so reduces any possible ‘resistance’ a client might have for being read a poem in a therapy session.

The hypnotist then further positions the poem in the hypnosis session, attending to its potential awkwardness and bolstering its presence as relevant. By informing Ezra
that she is going to insist that he listen to her poem (lines 6-8), Katie conjures an image of a captured (rather than captive) audience, and in doing so parodies a popular notion of hypnosis as directive (see chapter eight of this thesis), in which the hypnotist insists that the subject respond as he is told — to bark like a dog, eat an onion as if it were an apple, regress to the age of three, or sing like Michael Jackson — with the irony of Katie’s ‘insistence’ being that Ezra listen to her poem. Being told to listen to a poem in a therapy session, unlike being told to regress to the age of three, is not a familiar feature of hypnotic suggestions. In insisting, and in laughing at her own insistence (lines 7-8), Katie attends to the possible awkwardness of a poem, and in particular a poem that she has written, being read in a therapy session. If this were a poetry reading, in which people had come to hear poetry, there would be no need to insist that Ezra listen to her poem, since it would be assumed that that is what he had come to do. In a hypnosis session, where the hypnotist is supposed to be doing hypnotic things — such as trance inductions and therapeutic interventions — it is not immediately obvious what the role of the poem should be. The hypnotist’s laughter signals to the listener something of her attitude (cf. Sacks [1992] on laughter) towards the reading of the poem. This is a strange and potentially embarrassing situation, with the hypnotist about to read a personal poem during a session which will end with her being paid by the client on the understanding that she has done something therapeutic.

After a brief pause (line 9) Katie offers a reason for her insistence. Ezra has not immediately responded to the insistence, nor does he share in her laughter (see Jefferson [1979; 1984] on initiating ‘laughing-together’), and in that brief hesitation is a moment of uncertainty (interactionally speaking, of course) as to how Ezra is going to respond. As Katie begins her explanation (line 10) Ezra interrupts with an assurance that she does not have to insist (line 11). Katie, in telling Ezra that she wrote the poem for him, makes explicit why she shouldn’t need to insist — since she wrote the poem for Ezra he should be willing to listen to it. Katie’s insistence is clearly ironic, and as such prompts a reassuring response from Ezra to a potentially embarrassing situation for a therapist (rather than an immediate acquiescence, which might have signalled that Ezra was treating the insistence ‘literally,’ as a hypnotist’s authoritarian command).

The poem has now been introduced into the therapy session, with the peculiarity of its presence ‘interactionally managed’ (as CA/DA people would say) by the
participants, and Ezra's assurance that he is ready to listen to the poem affirmed. Katie then directs Ezra from the sofa where he has been sitting, to a seat closer to the microphone. She tells him that the seat will be more comfortable than the sofa. Once settled in his chair Ezra then begins to ask questions about how trance is to happen in this particular session.

* 

The final rehearsal, slipped into the text like an embedded suggestion, performs the living story of the thesis. The poem is therapy, is a chapter in a text, is an example of hypnosis, talked into being.
And when its done, and the actors have gone, what will reverberate
in the pale grained light of dusk
(Sleepstone. Textual therapist, now speaking).

* 

Spiralling Bird Data
Extract 2:9

20 Ezra:- Are we going in to trance?
21 Katie:- Yes we are.
22   (7.0) ((More settling sounds.))
23 Katie:- I'll I'll r-read this first, and then I'll just go off from there in whatever direction. (1.2)
24     My voice might (. ) go a little,
25 6°I think I'm (getting) a sore throat° ((clears throat))
27 Ezra:- >Oh dear < (. ) ahum
28   (2.0)
29 Katie:- ((coughs))
30 Ezra:- Will you eh:: shall we (. )
will we go into the trance and then you'll (.) you'll read it will you?

Katie: No. I'll read it as a trance induction.

Ezra: ↑: s:ee. What, before I (0.8) >close my eyes? <

Katie: No. You'll >clo[se your eyes<]

Ezra: [ Ye:s. ]Yes. Yes

Katie: I don't want you to go into trance too deeply anyway,

'tcos I want you to hear ( ) it's marvellous its brillia[nce hh hh hh hh] ((2 seconds of shared laughter))

Ezra: [hh hhh hhh hhh Oh I can see you are very modest.

Katie: ha ha hhh hhh hah

((Both laugh again. Katie’s prolonged laugh (4 seconds)
is heard above Ezra’s softer one.))

Having established that a poem is to be read in this therapy session, the participants then check out what kind of things are likely to happen around the reading of the poem, and what relationship the poem has with a hypnotherapy session. The poem’s intrusion into a therapy session has created ripples. In the ‘clarification’ process that follows, both Ezra and Katie negotiate the next steps of trance, and in doing so highlight expectations about what trance consists of.

‘Are we going into trance?’ Ezra asks (line 20), implying that the subsequent trance will be a shared experience. In using ‘we’ the client aligns with the hypnotist, displaying that he is familiar with hypnosis — he knows about trance, and how it occurs (and that it is something that people go into). Ezra’s voice rises into a question as he says ‘trance,’ implying that the question is on whether the reading of the poem connects with a hypnotic procedure, not whether Katie is likely to go into trance too. Although Katie echoes his use of ‘we’ to affirm that trance is going to happen, her emphasis is on ‘yes.’ The important detail to be clarified is not who is going into trance but whether it is to happen or not.

Katie will read the poem ‘first’ and then ‘just go off from there in whatever direction.’ (lines 23-24). As she maps her role in the impending trance induction as vaguely just going ‘off in whatever direction,’ there is a reflection that trance is like a
journey for both hypnotist and client, and that after the poem has been delivered Katie will drift casually into doing therapy, in a kind of intuitive and ad hoc way. The hypnotist has told the client that he is going to go into trance (lines 20-21), but that she is going to read the poem 'first' (line 23). This sets up an issue of what status the poem has, as something prior to, or separate from, the trance induction. Ezra (lines 30-32) seeks clarification by proposing a linear sequence between poem and trance (the opposite of Katie’s), in which trance will come before the reading of the poem. Katie responds to this by stating clearly that she is to read the poem as a trance induction (line 33). Again Ezra attempts, hesitantly, to clarify what the procedure of the poem reading and trance induction is to be (‘shall we, will we go into trance and then you’ll, you’ll read it will you?’ [lines 30-32]). The hypnotist is still being asked to provide an answer to the client’s question. She is the one, after all, who is in charge of conducting therapy, and introducing the poem into the session. Katie tells Ezra that she is to read the poem as a trance induction (line 33). This is the first sign, in the transcribed talk, that the poem is to be more than a poem, and that, in fact, it is to be the trance induction for that session.

33 Katie:— No. I'll read it as a trance induction.
34 Ezra:— I:: s:ee. What, before I (0.8) >close my eyes? <
35 Katie:— No. You'll >clo[se your eyes<]
36 Ezra:— [ Ye:s. ]Yes. Yes

Ezra’s response (‘I see’) displays him as coming to understand that the poem is intended as a trance induction. But he requires further clarification (‘What, before I...’). The drawn out ‘I’ and ‘see’ (line 34) suggest thoughtfulness (again, as a feature of an interactional display), and such that when he asks for the steps of trance to be made clearer by the hypnotist, it is because he is beginning to get the drift of what is expected to happen, rather than that he is resisting the placing of a poem in his therapy session. He then checks again. The poem is to be a trance induction, but what kind of trance induction? The kind that is listened to before eye closure? That is, is it a real trance induction which makes the listener close his eyes as he listens to it, or is it a kind of pre-trance induction, which is heard before the listener’s eyes close. What will make Ezra
close his eyes? In checking out what precise place the poem has in this hypnotherapy session Ezra highlights it as unusual, and in doing so also highlights what is otherwise routinely expected of trance. Eye closure is not only an expected and familiar feature within trance inductions for both participants, it is also an important indicator that trance has begun.

Katie tells Ezra that he will close his eyes (line 35). In saying ‘No. You’ll close your eyes’ she continues to display a knowledge (not yet shared by Ezra) of what is to happen with the poem. Thus, while the client shares the understanding that hypnotherapy sessions involve going into trance, and are signalled by eye closure, it is the hypnotist who informs him of what is to happen when the poem is read as a trance induction. It will be read as a trance induction, and the listener will close his eyes, as one might be expected to do in any proper trance induction. And as she says ‘close’ (line 35), Ezra shows that he’s got it. His first ‘yes’ overlaps her sentence, and he continues to say ‘Yes. Yes’ when Katie has finished talking, showing that he now clearly understands and accepts what is to happen.

As we have seen, when the poem is introduced as part of therapy, Ezra carefully checks out what steps are involved in listening to the poem and going into trance. I have suggested that his questioning of the poem’s place highlights a shared understanding between client and hypnotist of what hypnosis is, and that this understanding is negotiated in their talk. For Ezra and Katie, the therapy sessions have been co-constructed as

1. not usually including the reading of a poem, but involving a ‘trance induction’ of some kind,
2. with the expectation, therefore, that Ezra will go into trance,
3. and that his going into trance will be signalled by eye closure.

Once the ambiguous presence of the poem has been clarified, as the hypnotist and client negotiate what is to happen in this session, we see that this is, in fact, going to be a

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Eye closure is a recognizable feature of most hypnotic trance inductions, and displays that the listener is at least part ways towards being in trance (or sleep). ‘[T]here are very pronounced symptoms of genuine hypnotisation, and the expert operator watches for their appearance. At the moment when all effort is abandoned, there is a deeper sigh — as of relief — and closure of the eyelids’ (Orton 1958: 75).
usual sort of therapy session after all, with the reading of the poem simply being the trance induction which will lead the listener into trance.

Katie tells Ezra that she does not want him to go into trance too deeply (line 37), since she wants him to hear the poem. In her over-the-top description of the poem’s qualities — that it is marvellous, that it is brilliant (lines 38-39) — she once again treats her role as the author of a poem with irony, and attends to the delicate issue of reading it out in a therapy session. Katie begins to laugh as she says ‘brilliance’ (line 39), indicating what kind of response might be appropriate here (Jefferson, 1979). This time Ezra joins her in laughing, showing that he recognizes that this is not a serious description of the poem’s qualities, but rather a caricature of a poetry reading. His ironic response, that he can see she is very modest (line 40), further emphasizes his recognition that Katie is not seriously implying that the poem is so brilliant that he must listen to it, but that she is sending herself up.

Underlying the joke of a brilliant poem that must be listened to, however, is the treated as ‘given’ inference that Ezra will go into trance. In telling Ezra that she does not want him to go into trance too deeply Katie is implying that Ezra will go into trance, that trance can have levels of depth, and that he could, if she suggested, go into a deep/deeper trance. There is an assumption in this that she, as hypnotist, can dictate the most suitable level of trance. As I have suggested, the implication of shared knowledge works rhetorically, in this case to remove the question of trance not happening. Not only is ‘given information’ a feature of everyday conversation, however, it is also a specific Ericksonian technique (Erickson, 1980), used by Erickson, and his followers, as a way of avoiding possible resistance to direct suggestions (see chapter 7 on unconscious communication). For example, in the following extract (from a transcription of Erickson conducting a trance induction with a volunteer subject, in order to offer clinical training to the ‘junior authors’ of the manual [Erickson, Rossi & Rossi, 1976: 1]), Erickson is telling his subject that ‘drifting’ (into trance) is something which can occur more rapidly.

\[
\text{and you will note} \\
\text{that the drifting can occur} \\
\text{more rapidly...} \\
\text{(ibid.: 29-30)}
\]
Erickson (E) then explains how the hypnotic suggestion works indirectly (in the presence of his subject), ostensibly to one of the junior authors and trainee clinician, but perhaps also to the intended audience of the tape recorded demonstration. (Note how R elaborates on E’s explanation, displaying that while s/he may be a student of Erickson’s, s/he is enough of an initiate into Ericksonian techniques to be able to talk with some authority about what is going on in the trance induction).

E: By emphasizing ‘more rapidly’ you imply that drifting will occur.

R: Implication is thus a safe way of evoking and talking about behavior that may or may not be present. If you simply said, ‘You will now drift,’ that may arouse resistance.

(Erickson, Rossi & Rossi, 1976: 30)

Just as Erickson suggests that drifting (into trance) will occur, by emphasizing ‘rapidly,’ so Katie implies that Ezra, the listening client, will go into trance, by telling him that he should not go into trance too deeply. The poem, as a hypnotic device, is therefore shielded from possible failure by the indirect suggestion that trance is to happen, and that what is at issue is how deeply Ezra is to go into trance.

After four seconds of laughter Katie begins to read the poem, pausing at the end of each line. There are no conversation transition points, and no talk about hypnosis. Her words have rhythmic emphasis, and although she frequently pauses, Katie’s speech is not interrupted. It is likely, bearing in mind the previous talk of eye closure (lines 33-36), that Ezra now closes his eyes.

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1 Reading a poem, like telling a story, is a special suspension of ordinary turn taking, a booked long turn (Jefferson, 1978; Sacks, 1992).
Spiralling Bird Data

Extract 3:9

44 Katie:- .hhhh. It's called Spiralling Bird. .hhhh hhhhh. This is
45 the thought that turns me slowly (1.0)
46 holds me down (1.0)
47 down deep enfolds me (1.6)
48 folds me into quiet places (1.8)
49 faces me and turns me round (2.0)

* 

folds you into quiet places
faces you and turns you round

* 

think of this
the world turns and the words return
yet
some things change
your own vision
captivates your attention
the air stirs
and each particle renews its first thought
below the surface
caught up and winding on
is the spiral's
own
reflection

* 

The introduction of something unusual and unexpected highlights what is usual and expected. The unusual presence of a poem in a social science thesis (see chapter two) reflects the more usual treatment of poetry, in a social science department, as an item for sociological analysis. In the above extracts, the unusual presence of a poem emphasizes what is usually expected to happen during hypnosis, with an expected and acceptable kind of trance procedure constituted by the participants' talk. The hypnotist both attends to the awkwardness of introducing a poem, her poem, into the therapy.
session by being ironic and insisting that the client listen to her reading, and ensures the attention of her audience by reminding him that he was the one who requested a poem in the first place (extract 1, lines 7-10). Once the reading of the poem has been introduced, Ezra and Katie check out and confirm what is to happen, with the poem’s status established as a trance induction, rather than as a personal poetry recital (this latter category for the poetry reading is handled in the way that it is ironically introduced. It is not absent, but dealt with as a potential alternative interactional frame).

The vagueness of Katie’s initial description of what will happen after she has read the poem — that she will ‘just go off from there in whatever direction’ (extract 2, lines 23-24) — tells Ezra little, however, about how he is expected to respond. In the next few minutes of conversation he checks out more explicitly what he is to do during the reading of the poem, and thus what hypnotic trance is to consist of. As we have seen, it is the introduction of a poem into a therapy session which highlights what the participants understand hypnosis to be. This is emphasized in the way that hypnotist and client negotiate how and when the poem will fit into standard procedures, such as going into trance and eye closure.

You haven’t paid any attention to my protests over ‘negotiation’!

Not you again! Whose thesis is this?

Mine, I think. This word, ‘negotiation,’ raises all sorts of problematic images of separate parties pursuing their own political/industrial/personal agenda before coming to an agreement. Now, rather than concluding, from your transcribed data, that hypnosis is being negotiated between the therapist and client, I would say that the presence of the poem highlights that the therapist calls the shots, in terms of how the therapy session is to proceed. For example, in extract 2 (lines 20-21; 30-33; 34-36; 37-39), the client is clearly being directed by the therapist. He is even told where to sit, for goodness’ sake! What Ezra is doing, far from ‘negotiating’ with Katie over the necessary steps in making hypnosis happen, is checking out what is expected of him in this therapy session. Katie, on the other hand, does not ask Ezra whether trance will occur. She replies to Ezra’s questions unhesitantly, and leaves no room for doubt over what she expects Ezra to do while he is listening to her poem.
20 Ezra:- Are we going into trance?

→ 21 Katie:- Yes we are.

30 Ezra:- Will you shall we (.)

31 >will we go into the trance

32 and then you'll < (. ) you'll read it will you?

→ 33 Katie:- No. I'll read it as a trance induction.

34 Ezra:- I'll close my eyes? <

→ 35 Katie:- No. You'll <clo[se your eyes<]

36 Ezra:- [ Ye:s. ]Yes. Yes

→ 37 Katie:- I don't want you to go into trance too deeply anyway,

38 'cos I want you to hear

While 'negotiation' is a nicely democratic 'client-centred' (Rogers, 1961) therapist's type of word, I also think it is misleading. Ezra does not tell Katie that he (or she!) will close his (her) eyes, bark like a dog, or sing like Michael Jackson, in this session. He is informed that he will close his eyes while listening to the poem.

Furthermore, we need to bear in mind that this is Katie's poem, being presented as a trance induction in a hypnotherapy session in which she is the hypnotist, and also subsequently represented in a reflexive thesis about poetic forms and rhetorical constructions of hypnosis. It is likely that Katie is, first, going to have a much clearer idea about the place of the poem in the therapy session than Ezra, and also, second, a worked up argument for its place in her thesis, as a chapter, as analysis, and as data...

Well, this is my point exactly — the unusual presence of the poem, whether in the thesis, or in the therapy session, highlights hypnosis as a construction. In this case hypnosis as a negotiated process has been constituted by my analysis, with the reflexive
next turn illustrating the way that words are indexical and take on situated meanings that cannot be simply gleaned from a dictionary. In fact what we are doing now is negotiating the word ‘negotiate.’ In my analysis ‘negotiation’ has been used to represent knowledge as socially constructed through a process of exchanges between writers, commentators, critics (see Ashmore [1989: 2], on the negotiation of SSK itself), or, as interchangeable with ‘co-constructing,’ and negotiated between participants in a therapy session. The reflexive next turn, on the other hand, treats the word as bound up with issues of control, and uses its connections with power relations to problematize the interaction between therapist and client as a democratic kind of ‘negotiation.’

Alternative forms have been used throughout this thesis to indicate its construction, to imply a multiplicity of meanings and perspectives, to invite the reader to take part in deconstructing the author’s authority, and thus to prioritize the reader’s own reading of the text. The final ‘negotiation’ takes the form of an open invitation for the reader to now notice the extent to which she might have been in trance, and to suggest that the therapy of this text is in the embedded...

Oh no! Not the embedded metaphor stuff. I really don’t think this is a good idea... Speaking of negotiations, do you know what the problem with this dialogue is? Your irritating interruptions.

It’s sorting out who has the last turn. How about, since you insist on bringing the reader into this (and it looks to me suspiciously like shifting responsibility onto the reader so that if he doesn’t respond therapeutically, then you can claim resistance to the text), you let the reader take the last turn (as in Mulkay, 1985).

I’m sorry, but there is no ending, no last turn (and no room for jokes about spiralling birds and last terns). The sequel returns us to the prelude, and enables us to write/read it all again.
Sequel

This is for you

You measure the distance between here and the top
of the mountain and the view unfolds
The higher you ascend the more you comprehend..
the shape of the rocks..
the sound of the air tending to the trees..
the scent of dust, crushed herbs,
the slow trail of resin on wood.
Sun makes particles of your thoughts
and
the sky
lifts up your glance.
The world turns and the words return.

And
something brings you back and beyond,
through the gates and over.
The sight and sound
of this image
remains
ever
turning
on

*

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I've just had a terrible thought.

**Mmm.**

Well you know how the spiral image is supposed to reflect the proposal that there is no end to this thesis, that it turns upon previous works, and continues turning (up in subsequent texts), in the reader's thoughts, responses, next turns (e.g., Mushakoji, Ph.D. thesis in preparation)...

**Mmm.**

..with the sequel intended to echo the prelude, implying the reader's return to the beginning (as in Ashmore et al, 1995), but this time to take a new perspective..

**Mmm.**

...well, this thesis *has* to end, since I have presented it sequentially (rather than requesting that the reader now turn, for example, to page 48, and from there to read pages 8 and 9...). I mean 'Zolberg, V. (1990) etc.' (page 260) is the same sort of end to any academic text as —

‘Zuckerman, H., 63,115,133, 240-41n. 17’

(9.0) [sound of footsteps receding]

**WAIT A MINUTE! COME BACK HERE!**

What?

You're not going to end there.

Why not? I thought it was quite a neat little twist actually.

No, let's be democratic here, and consider our three possible options (see page 14, footnote 1, on stages). One, you can go on to the first page with the reader (although, if I was the reader I would certainly object to the suggestion that I was going to have to go through all of this stuff again, and on for ever), and take another turn at reading/writing *Trance-Scripts*.

*I'll have that one.*

Second, you ironize endings by ending —

‘Zuckerman, H., 63,115,133, 240-41n. 17’
That one’s mine.

Third, you can close by steering the reader past the ‘prelude,’ bestowing your voice upon the listener, and wishing her well....

My voice will go with you?

No, my voice will go with you, but also suggesting that a preferable alternative might be just to follow me.

Oh? Where are you going?

[voice receding] Visiting. The biscuit tin first I think.

( ... )

*
APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions

The transcription symbols, used in the transcribed data of chapters eight and nine of this thesis, have been developed mainly by Gail Jefferson (as summarized in Atkinson and Heritage [1984]. See also Wooffitt [1992]).

[ ] Overlapping utterances are marked by a single left-hand bracket, linking at the point where the overlap begins,

] and a right-hand bracket at the point where the overlap ends.

(0.0) Pauses are timed in tenths of a second and inserted in parenthesis.

(.) A dot in brackets indicates a hearable pause that is too short to measure.

( ) Single brackets indicate a word or phrase that is unclear (for the transcriber).

( () ) Participants non verbal activity is placed in double parenthesis.

: A colon indicates an extension of the sound or syllable it follows.

↑↓ Upward/downward pointing arrows mark rising/falling intonation, and are placed immediately prior to rise or fall.

→ Used by the analyst to draw attention to a particular section of the transcription.

> < When talk is delivered at a pace quicker than surrounding talk it is enclosed in ‘less than’ signs.

___ Underlining indicates speaker emphasis.

° ° Talk contained within degree signs is noticeably quieter.

.hh A dot before an ‘h’ indicates speaker in-breath. The more h’s the longer the in-breath.

.hh An ‘h’ indicates out-breath. The more h’s the longer the out-breath

? A question mark indicates rising inflection.

= ‘Equals’ sign indicates a continuous flow of speech either from single speaker (for example during an interruption), or between speakers.
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