

## **HYPNOTIC SUGGESTIONS - a Revisit**

by

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(In this paper, the male pronoun will apply to either gender. Where the plural pronoun is used, it will apply to both authors. Where the nominal pronoun is used, it will apply to the first author.)

What is a hypnotic suggestion?

Is it when you utter such words as:

*And your eyes will become more and more tired*  
and you will feel that you want to close them.

If you say, "Yes, the above sentence is a hypnotic suggestion," then, what about this second sentence:

*And your eyes will open wider and wider*  
*and you will feel more and more wide awake.*

If you say that the second sentence is not a hypnotic suggestion, then what are you using to decide that the former is and the latter is not?

However, if you were to agree that the second is a hypnotic suggestion, then, what are you using to conclude that both are hypnotic suggestions?

What about this?

*As your eyes feel more and more tired,*  
*you will feel your body tingle with more and more excitement.*  
Is this a hypnotic suggestion?

Or this:

*As your eyes feel more and more tired*  
*your whole body is feeling more and more tired.*  
Is this a hypnotic suggestion?

Then there is this:

*When your eyes are so tired and they close,*  
*you will have an uncontrollable desire for fish and chips.*  
Is this a hypnotic suggestion?

What about:

*When your eyes are so tired and they close,  
you will have an uncontrollable desire to see Gone With the Wind.  
Is this a hypnotic suggestion?*

Clearly, it is untenable that a suggestion is hypnotic only because there are semantic intimations of relaxation and tiredness in its linguistics. We can say this with assuredness because:

1. when I was the subject of Reveen the Impossible on the stage at Hamilton Place, Hamilton, Ontario, I was before some 3,000 people. I was conducting Beethoven's Fifth Symphony before a full symphony orchestra. I did this because Reveen put it to me to do so. And I was also to swim in a 100 metre free style Olympic race . . . on the stage. I did this because Reveen told me to do so. I decidedly and freely did all these things and more as a by-product of his hypnotic suggestions. However, it is interesting that, as I was engaged in these hypnotic activities, he did not tell me, during or after, to:

*Relax deeper and deeper.*

*You will feel more tired and more tired.*

2. those of us who have attended the excellent demonstrations on stage hypnosis at the Annual NGH Conferences will recall the outrageously funny suggestions put to the subject and that the linguistics and the semantics of the linguistics have NOTHING to do with "relaxation" or "sleeping deeper."

Ernest Rossi<sup>1</sup>, in his hypnotic work, maintains a period of studied silence with the utterance of some intermittent guttural that is intended to be reassuring and supportive of whatever the internal processes are that might be going on within the subject. He does not utter such words as, "Relax deeper and deeper." However, this Rossi method, will achieve neither the kind of fantastic results that Reveen the Impossible evinced from me and my fellow stage subjects nor the extraordinary stage acts at the NGH demonstrations..

So, what then is a hypnotic suggestion?

It is quite clear that a suggestion is hypnotic if the articulation secures what is intended, by the operator, provided it satisfies two conditions:

1. it is something that is not and would not be acceded to under "normal<sup>2</sup>" conditions
2. it is either actualized and/or executed by the subject.

In life, we articulate considerations to others and they are acceded to, e.g., "Would you pass the salt please?" or "As you come in, would you bring in the newspaper?" People comply yet we would not consider these articulations to be hypnotic. Therefore, we say that the articulation is hypnotic when what is asked is something that would not normally be acceded to in life, e.g., "Will you quack like a duck now?" or "When you sit down, you will feel as if you sat on a hot burning coal and you will jump up with a scream!" With the former, you would probably get a "No!" and with the latter you might get the response, "Don't talk rubbish."

You will also not actualize this if I were to say to you, “You will recall your moment of worst grief and you will break down in tears and sadness - now.” You would probably reply, “What on earth are you talking about?” However, in Hypnosis, this is what can take place as a function of the conditions of the interaction between an operator and a subject.

No one would normally accede to a directive, “*Crow like a cockerel.*” or “*Leap like a frog*” or “*Swim on this floor as if you are in an Olympic free style race.*” However, people will do so in Hypnosis. Therefore, for a person to accede to such requests, in hypnosis, the internal constraints that normally indexes to them to not agree to such requests, are somehow displaced or set aside. In the old days, the thinking was that a faculty called Critical Factor<sup>3</sup> was set aside or was inoperative.

In saying this, it becomes clear that:

**Any utterance is a hypnotic suggestion, when, it is articulated to a person, whose normal internal ontological constraints are in abeyance. This is so when Critical Factor is set aside.**

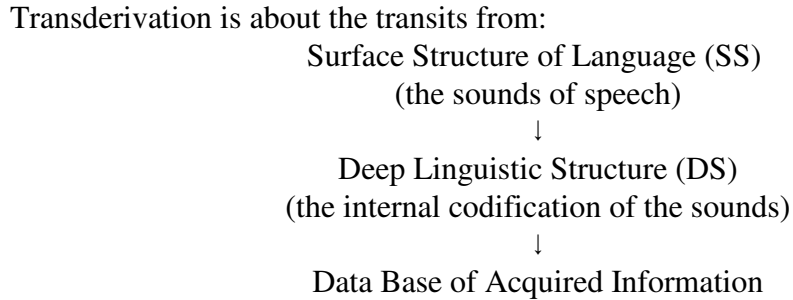
The above is one class of hypnotic suggestions which we call Class 1.

However, there is another class, which we term as Class 2. These are suggestions which a subject will actualize even though normal ontological constraints are *in situ*. I was at a five day in-house training with the late Milton H. Erickson M.D. of Phoenix Arizona. He said a sentence to me that was utterly innocuous. I certainly did not pay any attention to it. Then he asked me how I felt about the saddle anaesthesia across my back! The moment I heard his question, I became fully aware that there was a complete and deep numbness across my low back. The funny thing is that his articulation did not contain any words that had anything to do with numbing or pain free or no pain or relaxation. However, as I noted above, I was fully aware that I was numb across my back.

In Class 2 we are looking at effective hypnotic suggestions that are applied “covertly.” The construction of the hypnotic suggestion is such that it compels its desired transderivation<sup>4</sup>. How does it work? We shall examine this below.

Of the two classes of hypnotic suggestions, Class 1 is a function of having induced a hypnotic state. This happens when a person’s normal ontological constraints or Critical Factor has been set to one side. When this is done then an utterance will be accepted. This being so, the utterance is said to be a hypnotic suggestion. Class 2 is a different matter and is much more challenging to create. Clearly it involves articulations that by virtue of their internal semantics will compel either transderivations of the desired altered state or the desired action. This then begs the question, “What is a transderivation?”

The word “transderivation” is composed of two elements, *trans* which is Latin for **across** and *derivo* which is Latin for **to turn** or **to divert**). Today, the word means to track across to or to turn across to or to divert across to.



where ↓ stands for transderivation. The opposite ↑ stands for generation. Generation of course refers to the generation by a person of his spoken words, feelings or actions.

A Class I hypnotic suggestion is, therefore, a verbal input that has the property of determining a transderivation to some point of consideration in a subject's data base that the operator would like. Thus, if the operator were to say, "Relax," the subject will arrive at an isomorphic transderivation in his data base. However, this is done analogically, i.e. by the body language

If a subject is not in trance, he might inform the operator that, "When I hear you ask me to relax, I do not feel that way at all. In fact, I just feel I want to get off this chair and run a marathon." It would not do either if you were to ask a friend, "Shall we go on the Boston Marathon?" and he replies, "No! I feel so tired when I hear you say this, that now, I could just go to sleep." What you begin with, i.e. your intended meaning, is not what you are going to end up with as the meaning understood by the other person. The surface elements of your spoken word only carry, for you, the semantics of what you intend. They may not do so for the other person as the surface elements may track to a transderivation that you may not intend at all. You only have to refer to the above examples to see what we are indexing here.

In Hypnosis the transderivation of the semantic elements in SS that constitute the input item of information, will undergo appropriate transformation by the time they arrive at the site in the data base. Those of us who have seen good stage hypnotic performances witness that when the hypnotist say XYZ the subject feels or does XYZ.

Now in Class 2 suggestions, the person is not in a trance. Yet, the verbal input will secure the outcome. Let us suppose that I want you to feel angry. Would you be angry if I were to articulate this SS, "BE ANGRY!"? There is good possibility that you will reply, "Don't be silly, I am not going to be angry, especially if you speak just ask me like this."

However, if I were to utter this sentence - "YOUR MOTHER IS A COW!", now, you will probably be angry and you will reply, "How dare you . . . !" and so forth. This articulation in SS, "YOUR MOTHER IS A COW!" when the operator intends such an outcome would be a Class 2 hypnotic suggestion.

So the articulation "BE ANGRY!" is not a hypnotic suggestion. However, "YOUR

MOTHER IS A COW!” is because, as the operator, I wanted to articulate a hypnotic suggestion that would entail a specific track in your transderivation with the consequence - you becoming angry. With the former articulation, I failed. With the latter I succeeded.

It follows that, if you were to say in surface structure, “Feel no pain,” it will not entail what you intend. What then are you to say that will hypnotically entail what you want? This is what Erickson taught me in the experience cited above. In time, Jennifer and I were to teach the construction of these Class 2 suggestions. How effective was our work is evidenced by the email I received from Sam Yoshida<sup>5</sup> who attended a workshop that we gave on Hypnosis and Pain Control:

**From: Sam\_Yoshida@-----.on.ca**  
**Date: Wed, 4 Jun 1997 11:22:56 -0400**  
**To: dchong@cgo.wave.ca**

**Dear Dennis,**

**Thank you for that great workshop. Today I had to do a bone marrow on a woman who weighs 450 lbs. The doctor who saw her before me had to do the marrow under fluoroscopy. I used your technique with trepidation because it does not employ any suggestions of numbing (our underline) the area or using visualization to decrease the awareness in that area. I was truly amazed that she was totally anaesthetic to the whole procedure and felt nothing. Usually I never know whether I will get anaesthesia or not. Your method truly is a "knife without pain". Thank you so much and my patients will thank you too I am sure.**  
**Sam Yoshida**

Here, in this email is the evidence for Class 2 hypnotic suggestions. In SS, they do not index in any way the semantic intent of the operator. However, the SS articulation indexes the track of the transderivation to the desired semantic end point that the operator wants. In this case, it was to have “no pain.”

“Covert” Class 2 hypnotic suggestions are, therefore, unconscious in their operation. For this, they would be deemed to be more powerful and assuredly effective.

**Endnotes:**

1. **Ernest Rossi** was a student of the late Milton H. Erickson, M.D. of Phoenix Arizona. In time, he co-authored several works with Erickson.

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1. **Ernest Rossi** was a student of the late Milton H. Erickson, M.D. of Phoenix Arizona. In time, he co-authored several works with Erickson..

2. “**normal**” here refers to what is normal for the given person.

3. **Critical Factor** is a turn of phrase about our ability to criticize. However, to do this merely speaks to our ability to evaluate, adjudicate and give an opinion. It is our ability to analyse. For us this only means that we have the ability to go meta to people, things, positions and relationships. Therefore, we term this faculty, the meta function (m(f)).

4. **transderivation** is the conclusion we come to from what we get from the surface forms. Thus, on the surface you hear, "I was standing by a beautiful stretch of blue water and I felt so good." Your transderivation may be that the stretch of blue water was at high noon. However, the speaker is thinking of the event at sunset. At a party, the game is you are blindfolded. They ask you what is it that you feel. And they have stuck your finger into a hole that they have cored into a tomato. What is your transderivation.

6. **Sam Yoshida** is a well known oncologist in Southern Ontario.

#### **References:**

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