

BOOK REVIEW

The Beginner's Mind

The Collected Works of Milton H. Erickson

Volume 6 – Classical Hypnotic Phenomena, Part 2: Memory and Hallucination

Edited by Ernest Lawrence Rossi, Roxanna Erickson-Klein & Kathryn Lane Rossi

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This second volume about hypnotic phenomena addresses various forms of hallucination and altered perceptions. Memory, visual, aural, and time distortion in hypnosis prove to be a true test of our sense of reality.

Each subject in this compilation is fascinating, and there are also deeply insightful comments about the way Erickson practiced hypnosis, which is juxtaposed to the chapter by Stephen Lankton, who endeavours to describe the Erickson “model,” which he calls the “Basic Footprint.” (p.345)

We are reminded how Erickson would actually “...utilize resistance and a subject’s own memories” (p.3) because “He does not analyze or discuss the subject’s negative set as a ‘faulty attitude’ or ‘resistance.’ Instead he arranges circumstances that permit the negative set to discharge itself fully...” (p.6) Erickson would encourage someone who claimed to be non-hypnotizable to fail in some set task, which released them from having to resist the next and still maintain their conviction. Memory is a vital element to mentalizing. “For Erickson, it is the subject’s real-life ‘experiential learnings’ rather than imagination per se, that are the raw material of hypnotic experience.” (p.11)

The idea that the subject’s or client’s natural and personal experiences are key to productive hypnotherapy arises several times throughout the text. “Your words are not putting anything into patients; they are just stimuli tripping off programs already present...” (p.18) This reflects the client-centered and client-responsive approach that emerged in luminaries, such as Carl Rogers. Erickson knew that “...the hypnotic state is an experience that belongs to the subject...” (p.19), “...the role of the operator is no more than that of a source of intelligent guidance.” (p.20)

Rossi describes Erickson as a “genius of utilization,” (p.25) but we need to think about the meaning of utilization. Rossi also describes Erickson as a genius of observation. Combining these, utilization might be described as a response to observation where the observation provides the therapist with the “suggestion” of how to resolve the client’s needs. A wide scope of therapeutic skill is important for the therapist, but many processes need to be tempered with sensitivity. In the chapters on sensory and perceptive alterations and shifts, we witness Erickson’s genius of observation and sensitive response/utilization across a wide range of clients.

Part I explores memory and hallucination, and Part II looks at color hallucinations and other alterations of visual phenomena, which I found fascinating. I was also drawn to comments on the importance Erickson placed on utilizing natural qualities and personal frames of reference, for example, the one by Rossi: “...no one other than Erickson in the entire history of hypnosis...has made such extensive efforts to understand an individual subject’s own frame of reference and particular motivations and then ingeniously utilize these to facilitate profound hypnotic experiences.” (p.36)

Part III seamlessly shifts from visual phenomena to auditory processes. This volume is an excellent organization of Erickson’s papers. It’s like being taken on a private tour without any need to double back or jump from one place to another. Quite an extraordinary feat over 16 volumes!

Part IV is concerned with an interesting aspect of hypnotic phenomena – time distortion. As each chapter explores the nature and effect of time distortion in hypnosis, it becomes apparent that time is not a fixed perception. I have witnessed the inability of clients to accurately assess the period of time they have been in hyp-

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notic trance. And, I have had dreams in which the imagery spanned days, even weeks, and yet I was actually only in a relatively short period of REM sleep. There is a clear discrepancy between "...world time and the subjective or experiential time..." (p.213) The general waking trance state of "flow," as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is also characterized by a sense of timelessness. Erickson certainly wonders and invites us to wonder "What constitutes subjective reality?" (p.209)

Part V moves into an exploration of hypnosis research. It is important to know what is being researched and the difficulties in framing the highly subjective nature of hypnotic processes. In the research on hypnotic anaesthesia, a patient under general anaesthesia reported being aware of the operating room, while at the same time enjoying a fishing trip at a lake. Erickson commented, "I regard hypnotic techniques as essentially no more than a means to asking your subject (or patient) to pay attention to you so that you can offer them some idea which can initiate them into an activation of their own capacities to behave." (p.308).

This indicates that hypnosis is less manipulation and more a means to access the patient's own natural abilities, inclinations, and needs. The process is all about the patient. Stephen Lankton's chapter, "A Basic Footprint of Milton H. Erickson's Process of Change," provides a framework for conducting reproducible research that can be translated into other areas of life.

The final chapter is a paper on the Rossi Creative Psychosocial Genomic Healing Experience. and the current psychosocial genomic research which seeks to reveal the actual gene expression that occurs during a hypnotic process. It's as if one is catapulted into an episode of Star Trek. We are suddenly able to see how far we have come in research.

This volume addresses variability – of realities, perception, sight, sound, and time. After reading it, I pondered what is and what is not, and also, my momentary functional existence in the subjective compared to the objective view. I am challenged by Erickson to reflect deeply on the workings of my inner self.

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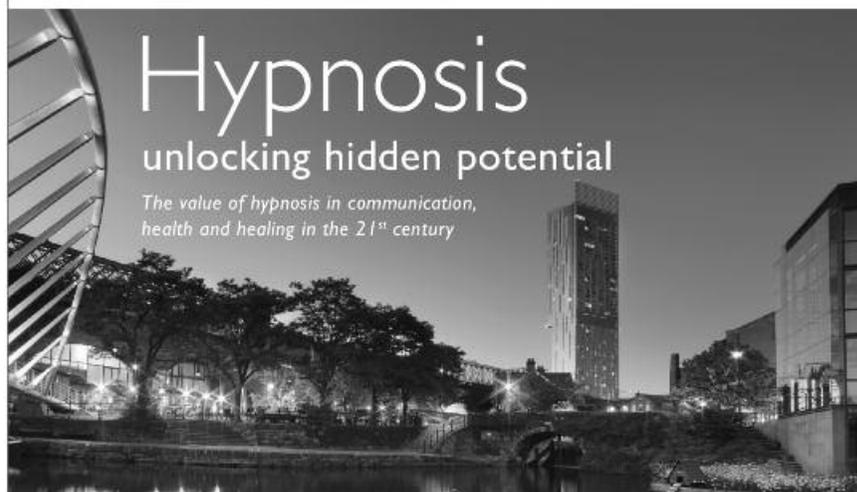
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