

Consensus Trance

The Sleep of Everyday Life

Charles T. Tart

trance 1. A state of partly suspended animation or of inability to function; a daze; a stupor. 2. A state of profound abstraction of mind or spirit as in religious contemplation; ecstasy. 3. A sleeplike state such as that of deep hypnosis.

—*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1973)*

In this chapter we examine our everyday, "normal" state of consciousness, but we will look at it in the way we examined the phenomena of hypnosis. What is the setting in which everyday consciousness develops? What are the induction procedures for creating it? What are the phenomena that the "hypnotist" can bring about? Normal consciousness will be referred to as *consensus trance*; the hypnotist will be personified as the culture. The "subject," the person subjected to this process, is you.

This may seem somewhat artificial at first, but we will come to see that consensus trance is a much more pervasive, powerful, and artificial state than ordinary hypnosis, and it is all too trancelike. Consensus trance involves a loss of much of our essential vitality. It is (all too much) a state of partly suspended animation and inability to function, a daze, a stupor. It is also a state of profound abstraction, a great retreat from immediate sensory/instinctual reality to abstractions about reality. As to the definition of trance as a state of ecstasy, consensus trance has its rewards, but it is questionable to call it "ecstasy."

Remember that the emphasis of the second part of this book is diagnostic of the psychopathology of everyday human life: what is lacking in human life that makes us so unhappy? Love, courage, compassion, creativity, and other positive aspects will concern us later. Here I will be emphasizing the negative side of culture and consensus trance induction. Nevertheless, we need culture. It gives us enormous benefits and is the matrix out of which our possible future evolution must arise. Keep in mind, also, that the consensus trance induction process is imperfect. We all have our own personal history that has uniquely shaped our own everyday consciousness. Just as people vary in their hypnotizability, we vary in how deep our consensus trance is. Thus the picture given below is too stereotyped, too simplified ... yet all too accurate.

CULTURE

Anthropologists have defined a culture as a group of people who share basic beliefs about the world and practices for coping with it. They interact with each other in a way that ensures the survival of the group, as well as a reinforcement and perpetuation of their basic beliefs. We speak of Chinese people and know that we are looking at quite different beliefs about the world than when we speak of Eskimos or Anglo-Americans.

Cultural Relativity

Anthropology has made a unique contribution to our understanding. By studying its detailed documentation of the differences, as well as the similarities, between many cultures, we have a better chance to realize individually the relativity of many (if not most) of our cultural beliefs. Societies of intelligent people, people who have passed the basic

test of surviving as a culture, have quite different beliefs about many of the things we hold to be obvious or sacred. Much that we hold to be obvious about the world, much that we consider sacred truths, could and should be called into question.

As an example, I often present my students with this hypothetical situation: "Your brother has just been murdered. You know who the murderer is. How many of you would call the police?" Usually every hand goes up. If I then ask how many people would feel shamed and disgraced for calling the police, I get puzzled frowns. What am I talking about?

From the viewpoint of quite a few cultures, the class has just revealed itself to be composed of the dregs of human society, shameful people who should be shunned. When a blood relative has been murdered, that is *family*. Personally avenging one's family is a matter of personal honor! Do these people plan to do the honorable thing and personally avenge the murder? No, they will let the matter be handled by a group of *strangers*, strangers (the police) who do it for money! How degraded can humanity get! It's no wonder that you can't trust foreigners and that the world is such a terrible place!

ENCULTURATION

When we are born, we are a mass of potentials, possibilities waiting to be developed. We are not born into an environment that is completely neutral about our potentials, though, nor into one that will try to develop all of our potentials. We are born with the potential to take personal vengeance on someone who murders a family member, and feel proud that we have done the decent and honorable thing. We are born with a potential to feel fine about letting the police handle it. It's unlikely that both of these potentials will be developed.

Each of us is born into a culture, a group of people with a shared belief system, a consensus about how things are and how they ought to be. As soon as we are born, the culture, primarily through the agency of the parents, begins to pick and choose among our potentials. Some are considered good and are actively encouraged. Consider the following example that was obviously proper in our culture for a long time but now has become questionable: "You're a good girl for telling the teacher about that kid who hit your little brother! I'm proud of you!" Other potentials are considered bad, and their flowering is actively inhibited and punished. "You were a bad girl to hit that boy who hit your brother! You shouldn't do things like that! Nice little girls don't do things like that! How can I love you when you do things like that? Go to your room!"

"Normalcy" and Membership in Your Culture

Becoming "normal," becoming a full-fledged member of your culture, involves a selective shaping, a development of approved ("natural," "godly," "polite," "civil") potentials, an inhibition of disapproved ("evil," "criminal," "delinquent," "disrespectful") ones. While it might be theoretically possible to role-play only in accordance with social norms, without internalizing them, this is difficult for most people. From a culture's point of view, it is far better if your everyday mind, the habitual, automatized way you think and feel, is shaped to reflect the culture's consensus beliefs and values. Then you will automatically experience the right perceptions and interpretations, and so it will be "natural" to act in the culturally appropriate way, even when there are no agents of social coercion around. When you automatically think, behave, and feel "normally," when the internal workings of your mind automatically echo most of the values and beliefs of your culture, you have achieved cultural consensus trance. This interlocking set of beliefs includes a belief that we don't have a "belief system." Foreigners have strange "beliefs," but we know what's right!

Cultures almost never encourage their members to question them. Physical survival has been too precarious for too many people for most of our history, so there is a deep, if implicit, feeling that our culture has kept us alive in a rough world; don't ask questions, don't rock the boat. Cultures try to be closed systems.

Yet many intelligent people have come to a realization of the relativity of some of their cultural values through personal experience. In the past those who traveled a lot, and who had the openness to see that not everyone else was a "savage" or "foreigner," could learn this. Our time is unique in that the enormous amount of anthropological material available on cultural relativity makes this realization much more readily available, even without travel. The kind of self-observation Gurdjieff taught, which we will discuss in detail later, can also help in transcending the limitations of our culture.

ESSENCE

Gurdjieff characterized a newborn baby as pure *essence*. Essence is your genuine, deepest self, your desires, tastes, likes and dislikes, potentials, inherent in you before the consensus trance induction process has begun to change it. Essence is who we really were when we came into this world.

Obviously we have limited repertoires as a newborn. Our characteristics include such things as being a good or a fitful sleeper, being generally content or irritable, liking certain tastes and not others. Essence also includes, in all those who become normal, the ability to learn a language and absorb a culture. But we are not a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which culture can write as it pleases with no consequences to us. We also have our unique genetic and spiritual endowment, which will begin to manifest more as we grow, so we might dislike athletics and like walking in the woods, for example, or find the taste of carrots disgusting and like the smell of sweat, or enjoy poetry but find math boring, or search for the inner light in spite of being ridiculed by others.

Consensus trance induction is a process of shaping the behavior and the consciousness of the baby, the subject, to be "normal," to ensure that there is a high level of standardization of behavior and consciousness in all people so they fit social norms. To be American, you must speak good English, you must have reasonably polite manners of the kind peculiar to your culture, you must look both ways before crossing the street, you must respect your parents and teachers, respect the American flag, you must etc., etc., etc.—add your favorite five thousand beliefs and attitudes here.

We cultural hypnotists do not think of what we do as consensus trance induction, of course. Most of us would be horrified at the idea of inducing a trance that involves lessening animation, reducing reality contact, and that resembles stupor. We sincerely think of what we do with children as "education," as teaching them skills that they must have to live a happy life. We are helping the children, not entrancing them! And this is, of course, true in many ways. A child *must* learn to look both ways before crossing the street, for example, or he may be killed. Just as an ordinary hypnotist utilized truths (your vision is getting blurry and you see changing colors around the target) to induce the formal hypnotic trance, the cultural hypnotist utilizes many truths in inducing consensus trance.

What happens to essence, the basic and essential you, in the induction of consensus

trance?

Suppression of Essence

If you are very lucky, and most of the characteristics of your essence are ones that happen to be valued in your culture, the induction of consensus trance is very smooth and free of conflict. Your adult life will probably be "normal" and successful. If your essence is short-tempered and aggressive, for example, and you happen to be born in a culture that admires warriors who are tough and proud, you may have to deal with realistic consequences of living in that kind of world, but there's no agonizing over whether you are normal. Suppose your essence is short-tempered and aggressive, but you happen to be born a woman in a culture where women are supposed to be docile and subservient. You may get into a lot of trouble when your temper comes out.

What would be even worse in this latter example, this aspect of your essence would probably be invalidated and punished until its external manifestations were suppressed. As an adult you would act docilely and subserviently, and try to feel that way inside. You would tell yourself that you are a good person, a normal person. Others would tell you you are normal, and would accept you as a friend, reinforcing your docile behavior and reinforcing your internal feeling of goodness. But inside, something, a part of your essence, has been squashed. If it has been squashed very thoroughly, so you don't even feel that quick temper, you may only have a vague feeling that something isn't right, that even though you should be happy, you don't feel very happy. Some of your animation, your essential energy, has been lost to the maintenance of consensus trance.

If the suppression hasn't been quite that thorough, so you know that lots of things make you angry but you can't or won't express the anger, then you can worry. "Am I normal? I'm not supposed to feel things like this, normal women don't get upset by these situations." Some of your essential energy has been lost by being tied up in knots, some goes into "neurotic" worrying about not being normal. Again, you have lost some animation.

Now we can begin our comparison of consensus trance induction with the induction of formal hypnotic trance.

SETTING AND PRELIMINARIES FOR CULTURAL HYPNOSIS

Recall the setting of our model hypnotic procedure. The Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale was administered in a relatively ordinary setting, a quiet room, a comfortable chair. The thought of being hypnotized adds a little glamour to the setting and procedure, but the usual scientific setting is low key and plays glamour down. The hypnotist may be somewhat older or of higher prestige than the subject, an "expert," but the hypnotic relationship is basically a relationship between two normal, competent, and consenting adults.

Constraints on Ordinary Hypnotic Induction

Although they may not be explicitly discussed, there are clear constraints on the hypnosis. For example:

- a. It is time-limited, usually an hour or two.
- b. The subject does not expect to be bullied, threatened, or harmed in any real way by the hypnotist.
- c. If the hypnosis does not work very well, the hypnotist will not blame the subject.
- d. The hypnosis may work well, producing a deep "trance," but the subject expects that the effects will only be temporary, and he will not be basically changed by his experience.

Basically, formal hypnotic induction is a voluntary and limited relationship between consenting adults, undertaken for scientific or educational reasons. The power given to the hypnotist by the subject is limited by time and the other deep ethical constraints mentioned above. A profound change in experience may occur for a while, but no basic or long-term changes in his personality or his reality are expected by the subject.

Consensus trance induction starts in conditions that give far more power and influence to the cultural hypnotists than is ever given in ordinary hypnosis induction.

Involuntary Nature of Consensus Trance Induction

First, consensus trance induction does not begin as a voluntary and limited relationship between two consenting and knowledgeable adults. It begins with birth. A newborn comes into the world with an immature body and nervous system, totally dependent upon its parents for its very survival, as well as its happiness. There is a sort of natural consent to learn, yet the power relationship puts a strong forced quality on that consent.

While the child will slowly acquire consciousness and capabilities to fill his own needs, the power relationship will remain very unbalanced for many years. Indeed, the power balance is much more like one we imagined and developed in myths, the power balance between gods and mere mortals, than like that between adults. The parents and other agents of the culture, the hypnotists, are relatively omniscient and omnipotent compared to the subject. Thus the setting for consensus trance induction involves much more power on the hypnotists' side than the usual hypnosis induction.

Unlimited Time for Consensus Trance Induction

Second, consensus trance induction is not limited to an hour's session. It involves years of repeated inductions and reinforcement of the effects of previous inductions. Given the way children experience time, the cultural hypnotists have forever to work on their subjects. Further, consensus trance is intended to last for a lifetime: there are no cultural hypnotists waiting to give you a suggestion to wake up.

This book is a suggestion to wake up. I am very glad that the power of the culture is not so strong that this suggestion cannot be given.

Use of Physical Force

Third, ordinary hypnotists cannot use force to persuade their subjects to cooperate in the process of being hypnotized. Indeed, it would be counterproductive in the usual setting. Cultural hypnotists, on the contrary, can use physical threats as needed, and actualize them with slaps, spankings, beatings, revocation of privileges, or confiscation of toys, when necessary. The fear of punishment and pain on the subject's part makes him very attentive

to the desires of the cultural hypnotists and quick to act in the desired way. Since *the easiest way to act in the culturally approved way is to feel that way inside*, the fear of punishment helps structure internal mental and emotional processes in culturally approved ways.

Use of Emotional Force

Cultural hypnotists are not limited to physical threats and punishment. Since the parents are the major source of love and self-esteem for the subject, they may threaten to withhold love and approval from the subject, or actually withhold it until compliance is achieved. "I can't love such a dirty little boy!" Manipulating the natural love children have for parents is another variation of this: "You wouldn't do that if you loved Mommy!" Many psychologists have felt that this conditional use of love (I'll love you if...), coupled with invalidation of the child's own perceptions and feelings, has a far deeper impact than simple physical punishment. Since love and affection are so real and so vital, they are exceptionally powerful manipulators. The fact that there is so much real love in most parent-child relationships adds to the confusion that assists in consensus trance induction: when is behavior manipulative and when is it just love?

Love and Validation as Rewards for Conformity

Fourth, cultural hypnotists can offer love and personal validation as a reward for compliant behavior. "What a sweet thought you had. You're a good girl. I love you!" "All A's! You're so smart!" The ordinary hypnotist can offer approval ("You're doing fine"), but it seldom has the potency that love and approval from his parents had on a child.

The personal validation aspect of consensus trance induction is very important. We all have a "social instinct," a desire to be accepted by others, to have friends, to have a place in our social world, to be respected, to be "normal." At early ages this acceptance and validation are mediated almost exclusively by parents: they define what being normal means. As the child establishes social relationships with other adults and children (who also act as agents of the culture), he learns more about how he must act to be accepted. As these approved habits of acting become established and rewarded, they further structure the habitual patterns of mental functioning. Fear of rejection is a powerful motivator. All of us probably have some memories of childhood agonies about whether we were "normal."

Guilt

Fifth, the subject, the child, is clearly at fault for failing to act in the culturally desired way. "Good girls do their homework!" By not doing your homework, you are a bad girl. Nobody likes being thought bad, so pleasing the cultural hypnotist is much more important than pleasing an ordinary hypnotist. We are invalidated in so many ways and told we are bad so often that a general sense of unworthiness and guilt can easily be built up. New condemnations or invalidations tap into this accumulated guilt, giving the new incident a power beyond that it inherently has. This in turn further adds to the underlying feelings of inadequacy and guilt. Origin myths of original sin make the matter worse.

Dissociation

Another factor that gives the consensus trance induction process great power is that the mental state of a young child is similar to the mental state of a deeply hypnotized subject in important ways. This increases the power of the "suggestions" made by the cultural hypnotists.

In a deep hypnotic state, for example, the consensus reality orientation (CRO) has faded into the background. When a particular experience is suggested, the suggestion and resulting experiences occur in relative isolation from other mental processes. When the hypnotist suggests your arm is heavy, a host of previous knowledge about normal arm processes and social situations does not immediately spring to mind and take energy away from the suggestion.

In our ordinary state there is an enormous amount of automatic association of previous knowledge to incoming stimuli. When something happens, this automatic association of all sorts of relevant knowledge helps you decide how to deal with the situation. A man begins talking to you as you walk down the street, for example. You notice the strangeness of his clothes, the odd way he pronounces words, a funny look in his eyes. Without seeming to think about it deliberately, you "instantly recognize" the man as a "crazy person." Your accumulated, culturally approved knowledge tells you to not get involved with crazy people, so you take no notice of him and walk on. Without these immediate associations that enabled you to recognize the situation as threatening or unpleasant, you might have gotten "involved" with this "crazy man," and who knows what might have happened then?

This kind of association is so automatic that we do not usually notice it, and it takes a look at *d*issociation to make us realize the pervasiveness and importance of association. The child's mental state is similar to that of the deeply hypnotized subject whose CRO has faded into relative inactivity. He does not have very much other information to come automatically to mind, nor is the association process so automatized that it always brings a wider context to ongoing events, so the cultural hypnotist's suggestions operate in a dissociated, nonassociated state that increases their power.

Much of our early enculturation and conditioning occurs before we have acquired much language. I suspect that language vastly increases our ability to associate information, so this lack of language further contributes to the dissociated quality of the child's mind. When we try, as adults, as predominantly verbal thinkers, to understand our enculturation and conditioning, it is difficult to recall because it is not stored in verbal form. This further increases the power of early enculturation.

Instinctive Trust in Parents

A subject in a deep hypnotic state, especially if it is deep along the archaic regression dimension, has developed considerable trust in the hypnotist. Indeed this trust has a magical quality to it, for some amazing things have happened just because the hypnotist said they would happen. Children have a similar deep trust in their parents. As we noted earlier, the parent often seems omniscient and omnipotent to the child, so this deep trust has magical qualities, and further opens the subject/child to further suggestions.

Expectations of Permanency

Finally, and most important, consensus trance is expected to be *permanent* rather than merely an interesting experience that is strictly time limited. The mental, emotional, and physical habits of a lifetime are laid down while we are especially vulnerable and suggestible as children. Many of these habits are not just learned but conditioned; that is, they have that compulsive quality that conditioning has. Because they are automatized habits, they do not need the support of a specially defined situation, such as formal hypnosis usually requires; they operate in almost all circumstances. You no longer have to work at maintaining consensus trance: it is automatic.

We can imagine an individual who could see that the things taught him as so important are merely the quaint notions of the particular tribe he was born into, not necessarily universal truths, but most of us cannot see that about the content of the consensus trance that was induced in us. In too many ways we *are* that trance.

INDUCTION OF CONSENSUS TRANCE

We begin the induction of consensus trance, then, with far more power, knowledge, resources, and sophistication on the part of the cultural hypnotist than the ordinary hypnotist can ever hope to have. The cultural hypnotist also possesses the "power of innocence": he is unconscious of the consensus trance he himself is in and simply sees himself as acting "naturally." The child, the subject, knows little and is genuinely dependent on the cultural hypnotists for survival, love, happiness, and validation. It is no wonder that the process induces a lifelong trance.

Cultural trance induction consists of several major groups of suggestions. Each group is repeated over and over, in a variety of forms. Punishment is given for failure to comply, as well as suggestions that you will be able to comply if you really try, if you are good. Love, pleasure, and validation are given as rewards for compliance.

Standards for "Goodness"

One major group of suggestions is concerned with developing potentials that the local culture considers good. "You can get along with the (respectable) neighbor's boy." "You can learn math; you should even try to enjoy it; you need it to get ahead in life." "Be nice to your uncle; he really does like you even if you don't think so." There are immediate rewards for developing potentials the culture values. The culture implicitly and explicitly promises that everything a person could want, all happiness, is attainable by developing these potentials, by becoming normal. Our most obvious example is the American Dream: anyone can become a millionaire with hard work.

Suppressing Deviant Thought and Behavior

A second major group of suggestions is focused on suppressing first the behavioral manifestation and then the internal experiencing of thoughts and feelings that the culture considers bad. "You must not get into shouting matches with your teacher!" "It's impolite (bad) to shout at people," for example. "Normal people talk rationally about their differences, they don't shout." "Your teacher isn't really picking on you, so you have no reason to get mad." "You're a good boy for learning to control your temper; you're so much

nicer now." Many consensus trance suggestions are intended to suppress disapproved or unknown types of internal experiences from occurring at all. "You only dreamed you saw a funny man in your room last night, Johnny, no matter how real you think it was." "It was just your imagination." "Nice girls never think about..."

Creating a Sense of Duty

A third major group of suggestions is focused on creating a sense of duty to cultural norms. "We are proud to be Americans!" "What do you want to be when you grow up? A doctor?" "It must be fun to want to be a garbage man, but when you get older you might want to be someone really important, like a lawyer or a businessman." The culture gets credit for making life safe, meaningful, and worthwhile. In return you must come to believe and accept its positive values and its prejudices.

Our culture tends to think the universe is a cold, hostile place. Then culture becomes the thing that protects us from this hostile universe, our only hope. We then have a quite natural-seeming duty to protect the culture.

And we are taught, of course, that we are the best. When you are the best, other cultures may be dismissed as quaint at best and inhuman or evil at the worst, especially when their actions might make you question your cultural givens.

Everything Not Permitted Is Forbidden

There is a common saying that mocks authoritarian organizations and cultures: "Everything not permitted is forbidden! Everything permitted is compulsory!" Unfortunately this is true in multitudes of ways in all cultures. Luckily for us, there are possibilities the culture never thought of forbidding because it doesn't know about them, and there are both misfits and truly mature people who keep trying out alternative ways of living and experiencing in spite of the fact that they are forbidden. Essence, also, wants to live and grow, and will try to grow in spite of the constraints of culture. Add to this the fact that our culture is full of inconsistencies and contradictions in this time of rapid change, and there are many "cracks" for the prepared mind to find ways out.

PARALLELS: HYPNOTIC TRANCE PHENOMENA AND CONSENSUS TRANCE PHENOMENA

Let us look at some parallels between the hypnotic trance phenomena discussed in the previous chapter and phenomena of everyday consciousness, of consensus trance.

Automatized Body Movements

The hypnotic phenomena of eye closure, hand lowering, and hands apart are three examples of automatized body movements. The common denominator of these hypnotic phenomena is that a mental image of bodily movement is created by the hypnotist's suggestions, and the corresponding movements then take place automatically in the subject's body. The key word is *automatically*. The subject does not experience doing these things voluntarily. His eyes close or his hands move involuntarily, as if they had volition of their own, as if the subject were merely a passive spectator.

At first glance these seem exotic phenomena: our bodies don't move by themselves in everyday life, but only when we will them to. Or do they?

Consider the behavioral phenomena of maintaining "personal space." Psychologist Robert Sommer at the University of California at Davis and others have shown that people have a semiconscious or unconscious sense of the space about them and get uncomfortable if others move into that space. People space themselves a certain distance apart for conversation, for instance. If one approaches, the other backs off. This behavior is usually completely unconscious, automatized, not requiring conscious attention. The body just maintains the proper distance without bothering to inform consciousness about it. The cultural hypnotist has, in effect, suggested, "Normal people stay X feet apart (unless the other is an intimate friend or loved one and the situation is defined as an embrace). You want to be normal."

It was probably not suggested so explicitly, of course. Children are natural imitators. We saw the spaces our parents kept (automatically) from others. We saw their retreats when people got too close. Perhaps we were punished for being too close when we got older. We imitated. Our imitation was probably conscious at first, but it quickly faded from consciousness and became automatized. Now we automatically stand at a "natural" distance from people. It feels "natural," but it's quite artificial, like so many consensus trance actions.

This is a minor example of automatized behavior, as, in most cases, personal space behavior can readily be made conscious by calling people's attention to it and asking them to observe themselves. When a conscious action becomes automatized, though, it may be difficult to make it conscious again, especially if there were unpleasant emotional experiences associated with the action. For example, suppose a boy was called a clingy wimp for frequently hugging and hanging around his father, and was pushed away by his father. There may be an unconscious equation that "Too close = unloved by Daddy."

An interesting situation results when members of different cultures whose definition of "proper" interpersonal distance differs interact. Typically, southern Europeans stand closer to others for conversations than Americans. A southern European talking to an American at a cocktail party may sometimes be seen slowly backing the American across the room. The American may feel pressured: he is trying to establish a "normal" distance. The European may feel rejected: he is also trying to establish a "normal" distance. The circumstances may force the cultural rules about proper distances into consciousness. If the unconscious equation "Too close = unloved by Daddy" is operative, though, the cultural rules about distance may not become conscious: they carry the danger of reminding the American about his fear that his father didn't love him. His mind may supply some convenient rationalization: "Europeans are pushy people. It's this man's personality that offends me."

This personal spacing behavior has characteristics like hypnotic suggestion. The stimulus of someone standing too close or too far activates the nonconscious, conditioned, automatized parts of the mind to correct the distance.

Gurdjieff stated that our movements are quite automatized. We have a fixed number of characteristic movements, gestures, postures, definitions of appropriate personal space, and the like, each keyed to certain situations and subpersonalities that bring them out. We

will examine subpersonalities in later chapters.

Attitudes

The mosquito hallucination is an example of hypnotically creating an attitude, a perception of annoyance. The hypnotist suggested that a mosquito was buzzing around, then landing on the subject's neck, ready to bite him, emphasizing that the subject didn't like this mosquito and could slap it. Many hypnotized subjects will slap it in response to feeling annoyed. Some will actually hear the mosquito. We will focus on the suggested annoyance and muscular response, and leave the hallucination itself for later consideration. Our basic phenomenon is this; in response to a cue, someone expresses annoyance and reacts to a "danger" that isn't actually present.

How often does someone read a newspaper article about an unpleasant event that harmed someone else and then become upset? You read about a murder in another town, become frightened, and then worry about whether that could happen to you. Your worry can spoil the evening for you.

It is one of the greatest human talents (operational thinking) to be able to read about danger that happened elsewhere and then realistically think about any parallels in your own life that might put you in danger. You simulate your world on a mental level, change conditions, see what happens then in your internal simulation, and draw conclusions about what to do, all without risking your body in the physical world. You can then take appropriate action to reduce your risk. Perhaps you put better locks on your apartment door, or decide not to walk through a poorly lit street on your way home at night.

But in this case, why the feeling of fright? Especially since this is probably the thousandth time you've read about a murder in the newspaper. You long ago put your life in reasonable order so there were no clear unnecessary risks. Why do you continue to read stories about murders in distant towns anyway, when you know that they frighten you?

In some way the cultural hypnotist has suggested that dangerous and tragic distant events will frighten you. It is like posthypnotic suggestion. Perhaps it came about through simple childish imitation: your aunt read these kinds of stories and became frightened by them; you imitated her. Wasn't she an adult, one of those godlike creatures with superior knowledge? If it frightened her, it ought to frighten you! Did one of the cultural hypnotists, your mother, for example, comfort you whenever you were frightened this way? Now we have another of those unconscious equations: "Feeling frightened = Mommy loves me!" Too, fear was deliberately used to control most of us as children: "If you're bad, the bogeyman will get you!" This can lead to further unconscious equations: "I am frightened, and so being good = Mommy loves me."

This kind of automatized and conditioned reaction distorts and interferes with our genuine capacity for empathy with others. Similarly it is important to experience your own mortality and vulnerability, but in genuine rather than conditioned ways.

Secondary Gain

Psychotherapists have studied a phenomenon known as secondary gain, which arises when a feeling or behavior that is obviously unhappy on the overt level has a hidden,

usually unconscious payoff. The hidden payoff often makes the apparently unpleasant or maladaptive experience quite worthwhile. Secondary gains can have very powerful influences on experience and behavior.

Gurdjieff observed that it was easy to make his students carry out frightening, unpleasant, demanding tasks, but almost impossible to make them give up their suffering. I have observed the same thing with my students. Work on something unpleasant in themselves? Yes. Be happy and nice to themselves for five minutes? No way!

The cultural hypnotist has linked many reactions and consequent behaviors to a variety of stimuli. Many of these are linkages that an objective observer would characterize as concern about imaginary dangers. We are annoyed by a lot of mosquitoes that aren't there. Why would the culture want you to be insecure in some ways? Because then you need the culture for protection and so will not be likely to question it or rebel against it in an effective way.

Distorted Perceptions

The mosquito hallucination, the sweet and sour taste effect, and the hallucinated voice are examples of hypnotic suggestions drastically altering the perception of the world, substituting a definite sensation for an absence of sensation. There is no mosquito, nothing was put in the subject's mouth, no one spoke over the intercom. Yet a mosquito was heard and felt, sweet and sour were tasted, a voice asked questions.

Psychologists distinguish between illusions and hallucinations. An illusion is a distorted perception of a real physical stimulus in your environment. A hallucination is a total creation of a perception when nothing is really present. If you walk into a dimly lit room and temporarily mistake a coat on a coat rack for a man lurking in the dark, that's an illusion. If the same nonexistent (as far as the rest of us are concerned) man walks out into the well-lit and empty hall with you, that's a hallucination. We can view illusions and hallucinations as extreme points on the continuum of simulation of the world. In illusion the simulation begins with sensory stimulation, but the simulation is a very poor representation. At the other extreme of hallucination, the simulation process produces a perception, an internal simulation, with no external stimulation involved.

The three hypnotic phenomena described are hallucinations. Hallucination can happen in consensus trance, but it's usually viewed (by other people in consensus trance) as so unusual as to be called crazy. Illusions, on the other hand, happen all the time and are not always recognized as illusions. If they are small distortions of the external world, or when others that you respect, who are also in consensus trance (important, "normal" people), have similar illusions, no one thinks it's an illusion; we all believe we're in touch with reality.

Consider the familiar newspaper story in which a seemingly pleasant, normal young man is suddenly revealed as a mass murderer. All the neighbors are shocked: he was such a nice young man. Was he that good at dissembling? No doubt he must have been fairly good at it, but there must have been numerous times he acted "strange," out of character. Our sensory, perceptual equipment is enormously sensitive when it functions properly. How could the neighbors have failed to detect any of those odd instances?

With hindsight, the neighbors will probably begin to remember odd things the young

man said or did. They perceived these things at the time they happened, but they didn't "know" them. Since they didn't fit into expectations, they weren't perceived; that is, they weren't included at all in the simulations of external reality that our minds created. Our culture is a rather friendly one, and we like to perceive people as "nice." A few suspicious types might have noticed these odd things, but the majority went along with the polite, decent way of perceiving. Our perceptions are constructions: we select (or rather our automatic habits select) from the large mass of impressions about us just those that fit comfortably into our expectations.

Many people distort their perceptions in the opposite way, of course. They see sinister implications behind actions that are quite innocent. Their automatized simulations of reality highlight the negative instead of the positive aspects of the situation. Indeed, one of the fundamental types in Gurdjieff's system of false personality types sees such sinister possibilities in others' behavior all the time.

Dreams and Daydreams

In hypnosis, a subject will "dream" on suggestion. Often the hypnotist can specify the dream content. For many subjects the hypnotic dream is experienced as a vivid fantasy; for some it is just as vivid and real in many ways as a nocturnal dream. The reader who wants detailed information can see my review paper on hypnotic dreams.

Our Western culture makes little attempt to affect the content of nocturnal dreams, but it does teach many (but not all) people to treat them as trivia, hardly worth the trouble of recalling, certainly not worth taking seriously. Much more effort has gone into influencing the nature and content of our daydreams and fantasies.

When was the last time, for example, that you daydreamed about journeying through the spirit world? Most of us will have to reply that it was a long time ago, if ever. A few will say "Yesterday," but those few seldom discuss such things in public. They know that "normal" people are not supposed to daydream about such things. Money, sex, power, blood-and-guts adventure, travel in this world, all these things are suitable topics for Westerners to daydream about, but not weird stuff. The contents of our dreams and daydreams usually reflect the norms of consensus reality very well. Indeed, most of the "forbidden" things we dream and daydream about are known to the culture. A clever culture has built-in safety valves, officially forbidden things that are widely used to drain off tension. Being able to dismiss these as merely "daydreams" lowers our fear of using them.

Personality Changes

The age regression effect in hypnosis is closely paralleled in consensus trance by the phenomenon of multiple selves or subpersonalities. To be as you were when you were five years old is to be like a different personality from your current one. In a certain situation we not only act a certain role, we identify with that role, we reanimate that subpersonality. The changes are automatic, triggered by the appropriate situational demands. The phenomenon of multiple selves is so pervasive and important that I devote a later chapter to it.

Nonperception

The hypnotic phenomena of anosmia to ammonia and the three-boxes negative hallucination are extreme examples of nonperception. Something is physically present to your vision, but you don't perceive it. At its simplest, you just don't notice something; your

simulation of the world is a little fuzzy. In its most developed form, you not only fail to perceive the blocked object, you positively hallucinate an appropriate approved object so that there's no gap in your perceptual field. A really good hypnotic subject, for example, perceives no gap or "blurry spot" where the third box is. He sees the grain of the tabletop where the third box is, just as he would if there were truly nothing covering that part of the tabletop.

In consensus trance we similarly fail to see all sorts of things the cultural hypnotist has suggested we don't see. An especially dramatic example reported in anthropological texts concerns the South Sea islanders, who had never seen a white man or a ship larger than a big canoe. When Captain Cook sailed into a bay of the island for the first time, the islanders gave not the slightest sign of seeing the ship, even though it was right in front of them. When a small boat set out from the ship to land, it was spotted immediately and the islanders were alarmed, as it seemed to have come from nowhere. The idea of a boat as big as Cook's ship was inconceivable to the islanders. Boats all fell within a certain size range, so they apparently had a negative hallucination of it at first.

It is difficult for us to apply this idea personally. How could something be right in front of our eyes but unperceived? Recall the mass murderer: with hindsight, weren't there a number of little actions that were strange, that could have alerted people to his dangerousness?

Insensitivity to smells, as in anosmia, is an interesting phenomenon. In our culture we believe that while animals have an excellent sense of smell, it is rather atrophied in people. Yet human smell is a very sensitive sense, far more so than we realize. Recent research has shown that humans emit pheromones, chemical compounds that have powerful effects. Women living together in a dormitory, for example, begin to have their menstrual periods synchronized after a few months. Mothers are able to distinguish the clothing of family members from that of strangers by the smell of small amounts of sweat in their dirty clothes.

Many people who have managed to break through this cultural taboo claim they can tell something about people's emotional states by their smell. Some psychiatrists, as a further example, have long claimed that they can diagnose schizophrenia because schizophrenics have a characteristic "funny smell." Insofar as this is true (and my own experience supports it), if we are actually interested in how other people feel ("Hi, how are you?"), why don't we sniff their armpits? Why do we routinely dose our armpits with chemicals that will disguise their smell?

As a culture, we are not particularly interested in the process of consensus trance induction per se. We are very concerned with "education" but have little awareness of how much of what is called education is primarily consensus trance induction. We are interested in producing "dependable, normal" people, culturally entranced subjects who automatically experience and do the right thing when the appropriate external-world situation presents itself. When normal people see A, they "naturally" feel B and do C. This is comparable to giving an ordinarily hypnotized subject a suggestion that when he hears or sees X, he will experience Y and do Z.

THE INDUCTION CONTINUES

Although we have focused on early childhood as the most intensive time of consensus trance induction, we must not think the induction process is finished just because we are adults.

Consensus trance is constantly being reinforced and deepened. Some of this effort is conscious, as in television advertising to sell products or, what is much the same thing nowadays, political activity to sell candidates and programs. Advertising is based on the fact that our associations and conditionings are similar enough that the right messages will manipulate us into wanting the product. The appeal to rational thinking in some advertising is usually also manipulative: certain kinds of people need to believe they are rational, so the advertisers give them material to reinforce this belief, meanwhile manipulating them into buying the product.

Much of the effort aimed at reinforcing consensus trance is not deliberate or conscious; it just happens mechanically. Every time you react in an automatized, conditioned way and get by, or get rewarded, consensus trance is reinforced. Much of our social interaction has this effect. I act normal, you act normal, our habits of being normal get a little stronger. Unpleasant consequences of our normal actions can be a great blessing if we are trying to awaken, but we can't depend on accidentally running into just the right combination of unpleasant circumstances to awaken us. Besides, the culture conditions us not to question things too deeply even when life is going poorly, because it offers us hope that everything will be better later. As we shall touch on later, continual effort is required to neutralize the continuing suggestions to sleep comfortably in consensus trance, as well as the effort needed to understand how this trance developed and to wake up from it.

Each of us is in a profound trance, consensus consciousness, a state of partly suspended animation, of stupor, of inability to function at our maximum level. Automatized and conditioned patterns of perception, thinking, feeling, and behaving dominate our lives. For too much of life, we are like the evolved crane/sorter: we appear to be intelligent and conscious, but it is all automatized programs. Many of these automatized and conditioned patterns may have been adaptive once upon a time, but they don't work well anymore: indeed, they may destroy us. We live in and contribute to mass insanity.

"But," you might well say, "I don't *feel* like I'm in a trance!" Of course not. We think of trance as something unusual, and our ordinary state as usual. We can only realize we are in a trance state by reasoning about it, as we have done in this chapter, and/or by experiencing what it is like to be out of trance, awake. We shall continue examining psychological data about consensus consciousness in the next few chapters, but eventually we'll discuss ways of producing the moments of greater wakefulness that give the concept of consensus trance a direct, experiential reality.

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