

*Morten Tolboll*

# Hypnosis, hypnotherapy, and the art of self-deception

My concept of *The Matrix Conspiracy* is a sign of the return of the Sophists (see my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**).

The Sophists were teachers of rhetoric, who against a fee, taught people how to persuade other people about their “truths”. Rhetoric is precisely the art of persuasion. Rather than giving reasons and presenting arguments to support conclusions, as Socrates did (and as all true spiritual counselors do), then those who use rhetoric are employing a battery of techniques, such as emphatic assertion, persuader words and emotive language, to convince the listener, or reader, that what they say or imply is true. The Sophists taught their pupils how to win arguments by any means available; they were supposedly more interested in teaching ways of getting on in the world than ways of finding the truth, as Socrates and true spirituality. Therefore any charlatan is welcome.

Hypnosis is a typical Sophistic technique. Being hypnotized is usually characterized by (a) concentration (b) relaxation, (c) suggestion, and (d) expectation. Hypnosis involves intentional manipulation of behavior. As such, hypnotism belongs under the broader rubric of Sophistic "persuasive techniques." It involves getting people to quit thinking critically in order to open them up to behavior modification. That is the central point of this article.

The versatility of hypnosis is unparalleled. Hypnosis occurs under dramatically different social settings: the showroom, the clinic (hypnotherapy), and the police station. My target here is the clinic.

The best definition for hypnosis is probably *The Power of Suggestion*. All hypnosis effects are simply the power of suggestion. The more suggestible someone is, the better their results. And the more suggestions someone complies with, the more likely they are to comply with further suggestions.

What is then the problem with hypnosis? The problem is not, that it can help some people loose weight, quit smoking, or overcome their fear of flying. My target is therefore not hypnotherapists, who exclusively work with these things, though I don't

recommend hypnosis in any form. My target is therapists/coaches who use hypnosis in combination with, for example, New Age occultism, Past-life therapy, Recovered memory therapy, or success coaching (the New Thought movement and the law of attraction) - see my articles **Six common traits of New Age that distort spirituality, Regression psychotherapies, Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**, and **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**.

The problem with discussing hypnosis as therapy/coaching is that people within the alternate self-help market often present themselves with a spectrum of private invented educations, including Hypnotherapist, Gestalt therapist, NLP psychotherapist/coach, Body therapist, Shaman, Clairvoyant, Healer, Spiritual teacher, etc., etc. As in NLP some Hypnotherapist educations will claim, that it is a method, which is based on a pure scientific way of thinking, and will refuse the connection with, for example, New Age occultism, Regression psychotherapy or success coaching. Others will fully acknowledge the connection with, for example, New Age occultism, Regression psychotherapy or success coaching.

As a matter of fact: In adverts in New Age and self-help magazines you can see how hypnotherapists are using hypnotherapy is connection with just about all kinds of different New Age theories, systems and techniques, as well as self-help programs of all kinds. So what hypnotherapy is depends on whom you ask. But the common problem is the incompetence of these educations and therefore the therapists (again: see my article **Six common traits of New Age that distort spirituality**). They are simply not competent to talk about people's personality flaws etc. I have several times been attacked by hypnotherapists for being critical, and often with referral to my "personality flaws", without ever having met me.

For some months ago I got an email from a friend who referred to a hypnotherapist who told about his several "certifications" such as: Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist (from the American Council of Hypnotist examiners) Hypnotherapist (from the National Guild of Hypnotists) and also the American Board of Hypnotherapy and even the international Hypnosis Federation. He also had a "Master Practitioner" certification in NLP.

After all this work he wished he instead had got himself an MA in Counseling Psychology or something similar. He told that the best definition he had ever heard for NLP was "the skill set of a con man." What he really learned from studying hypnosis and NLP was how to manipulate people – using thought distortions such as Confirmation bias, Testimonials, Communal reinforcement, Cold reading, etc., etc. He also told that the clients seldom were aware that he got his "Certified Clinical

Hypnotherapist” credentials from a three-day-weekend class – and that only one of his certifications required him to take so much as a written test. To become a registered hypnotherapist, he filled out a form and paid a registration fee. He listed his certification on the form but was not required to provide a copy of it. Then he was open for business.

He also told about a friend who was working towards becoming a licensed social worker. She had a MSW and was doing her 1000-hour supervision with an experienced social worker. We’re talking 3-4 years of work for her versus 50 hours and filling out a form for him. When his friend can open a private practice, she’ll probably be able to charge around \$ 100/hour for her services. He had been charging that (or more) for the last 5 years. Hypnotists and hypnotherapists want consumers to think of them as “professionals” and “therapists” because otherwise, based on the training requirements, you’d only pay them \$15/hour.

He also told that the kids wearing “Personal Trainer” t-shirts at his local gym probably had more training that he did when he started out as a hypnotherapist. In most states it takes more work to become a Real Estate Agent than a hypnotherapist. He asked: “Are consumers making an informed choice? If all you want is a “motivational coach” then fine. But I think a lot of consumers mistakenly believe hypnotherapists have had far more training than most do.”

So, in the following I will use the concept of hypnosis in a more broad sense, as for example in connection with the hypnotic effects that are in thought distortions such as *Communal reinforcement*, and propaganda as such (see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**). The problem is namely that hypnosis opens you for the power of suggestion, which is a kind of magical thinking.

New Age therapists for example think that hypnosis is a gateway to occult knowledge about the self and mystical insights about the universe. Hypnosis is seen as a way to open up the unconscious mind where these alleged truths and insights have taken up residence, but what they in reality open up for is the collective time, and not truth itself, namely the universal time.

To begin a spiritual practice is to begin a proces of awakening. In Zen it is for example said about the process of awakening: ”In the beginning mountains are mountains, and woods are woods. Then mountains no longer are mountains and woods are no longer woods. Finally mountains are again mountains, woods are again woods.”

This refers to the three forms of states the wholeness can be in: sleep, dream, awake. When the wholeness is sleeping, mountains are mountains and woods are woods.

This is the reality of the ordinary consciousness (the Ego-consciousness). The ordinary consciousness can sleep in three ways: 1) the dark sleep, which is the Ego's deep nightly sleep; 2) the grey sleep, which is the Ego's nightly dreams and other dreams; 3) the light sleep, where the Ego is awake.

The three forms of states the wholeness can be in, can also be described as the personal time, the collective time and the universal time. Furthermore it can be described as the personal history, the collective history and the universal history. Time and history constitute the structure under your thinking.

This structure is also called the astral plane, or the astral world. It is a plane of existence postulated both by classical (particular neo-Platonic), medieval, oriental and esoteric philosophies and mystery religions. It is the world of the planetary spheres, crossed by the soul in its astral body, either through the dream state, or on the way to being born and after death, and generally said to be populated by angels, demons, spirits or other immaterial beings.

The astral plane is connected with the so-called Akashic records. The Akashic records are a compendium of mystical knowledge encoded in a non-physical plane of existence: the astral plane. These records are described as containing all knowledge of human experience and the history of the cosmos. They are holding a record of all events, actions, thoughts and feelings that have ever occurred or will ever occur.

The Akasha is an "astral light" containing occult records, which spiritual beings can perceive by their "astral senses" and "astral bodies". Clairvoyance, spiritual insight, prophecy and many other metaphysical and religious notions are made possible by tapping into the Akashic records. They are metaphorically described as a library. They can be accessed through astral projection, meditation, near-death experience, lucid dreaming, or other means (see my article **What is Dream Yoga?**)

The Akashic records are the wholeness, and as mentioned: the wholeness can be in three states of spiritual awakening - sleep, dream, awake – which again can be described as the personal, collective and universal time (or history).

The collective time is a very dangerous intermediate area, if you not are very trained in realization and compassion. The collective time is the area where different kinds of anomalous phenomena are beginning to occur in your daily life. It is especially the lack of understanding this area, that is due to my critique of the many incompetent spiritual teachers you see today in the New Age movement. If you don't understand what to do when these phenomena arise, it can end in a spiritual crisis (see my articles **Six common traits of New Age that distort spirituality, Spiritual**

## **crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena, and A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork)**

Instead of spiritual wisdom, then hypnosis can create:

1) An illusoric state, where the conceptions of the roles for the participants in all of these beliefs and behaviors are learned and reinforced in their social settings, which have a quite particular worldview: for example New Age occultism, NLP, Law of attraction, Human design System, or other worldviews.

In other words: hypnosis makes you vulnerable for a number of thought distortions such as Argumentum ad Populum, Communal Reinforcement, The bandwagon Effect, Groupthink, Confabulation, Priming effect, etc. etc.

In logic, an *argumentum ad populum* (Latin for “*appeal to the people*”) is a fallacious argument that concludes a proposition to be true because many or most people believe it; it alleges: “*if many believe so, it is so.*”

This type of argument is known by several names, including *appeal to the masses*, *appeal to belief*, *appeal to the majority*, *argumentum by consensus*, *authority of the many*, and bandwagon fallacy, and in Latin as *argumentum ad numerum* (“appeal to the number”), and *consensus gentium* (“agreement of the clans”). It is also the basis of a number of social phenomena, including **communal reinforcement** and the **bandwagon effect**, the Chinese proverb “three men make a tiger” concerns the same idea.

Communal reinforcement is a social phenomenon in which a concept or idea is repeatedly asserted in a community, regardless of whether sufficient evidence has been presented to support it. Over time, the concept or idea is reinforced to become a strong belief in many people’s minds, and may be regarded by the members of the community as fact.

Often, the concept or idea may be further reinforced by publications in the mass media, books, or other means of communication. There is no doubt about that The Matrix Conspiracy (which is a strong advocate for the use of hypnosis and hypnotherapy) will be made propaganda for through mass media phenomena such as Transmedia Storytelling, Alternate Reality Games (for example The Blair Witch Project), Viral Marketing/Internet Hoaxes and Collaborative Fiction. As an example see my article **Time travel and the fascism of The WingMakers Project**.

The phrase “millions of people can’t all be wrong” is indicative of the common tendency to accept a communally reinforced idea without question, which often aid in the widespread acceptance of urban legends, myths, and rumors.

The bandwagon effect, closely related to *opportunism*, is a phenomenon - observed primarily within the fields of microeconomics, political science, and behaviorism – that people often do and believe things merely because many other people do and believe the same things. The effect is often called herd instinct, though strictly speaking, this effect is not a result of herd instinct. The bandwagon effect is the reason for the bandwagon’s fallacy.

As more people come to believe in something, others also “hop on the bandwagon” regardless of the underlying evidence.

The bandwagon effect occurs in voting: some people vote for those candidates or parties who are likely to succeed (or are proclaimed as such by the media), hoping to be on the “winner’s side” in the end.

In microeconomics, bandwagon effect describes interactions of demand and preference. The bandwagon effect arises when people’s preference for a commodity increases as the number of people buying it increases.

Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that occurs within groups of people. It is the mode of thinking that happens when the desire for harmony in a decision-making group overrides a realistic appraisal of alternatives. Group members try to minimize conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation of alternative ideas or viewpoints.

The primary socially negative cost of groupthink is the loss of individual creativity, uniqueness, and independent thinking.

Groupthink is related to argumentum ad populum.

Other thought distortions, which hypnosis makes you vulnerable for, are sophistry, persuader words, rhetoric, ideology, magical thinking, priming effect, and so on (see my book **A Dictionary of Thought distortions**). I will go further into the problem of propaganda and ideology later in this article.

2) A dependence of the technique. Regardless whether you make use of psychotherapy, clairvoyance, healing, body therapy, regression, dreaminterpretation, chakras, then there will always be more. You can continue and continue, you almost become dependent of it like drugs or sex, because the actual magnet, which attract the whole of this area with its energy – the Ego - has not been realized. The Ego will with

its evaluations create new problems, new content, new longings, new dreams - which again is in need of therapy, consultation etc., indefinitely. The spiritual development stops, it leaves the rails and ends up blind.

3) A spiritual crisis, where you for real are coming in contact with the energies and phenomena of the astral world's collective history. A spiritual crisis can be expressed in two ways: A): as suffering, often called The Dark Night of the Soul, or B) as Ego-inflation (inflammatio). See my articles **Spiritual Crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**, and **The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment**).

### **Hypnosis as a tool for propaganda**

The astral world's collective history manifests itself in a widely and indefinite area, for example could a broad spectrum of common human activities and organizations be called manifestations of the collective time: parties, state formations, wars, work communities, concerts, clans, tribes and sects, mass psychological phenomena, religious parishioners, fashion streams, group souls. Such incalculable common human undertakings are manifestations of collective energy- or lifeprocesses, in which there are great powers in play in the form of collective astral images.

The problem is, in this connection, that the same astral energy, which can be used unselfish, also can be used turned stimulative into the Ego-structures, whereby the Ego can loose balance and expand to a super-Ego, or in another way be demonized. It is this, that happens in the spiritual crisis. You have gone out in the astral world's collective history with your Ego; that is: spiritual seen you are not sufficiently awake on these areas.

The lesser realized transmission of energy and consciousness is therefore characterised by people, who admittedly have an opening to the astral world's collective time, but not to its universal history. Such people are often not able to discriminate between the image and the reality, and therefore they relate absolutely to the relative. They have been caught by the power of magical thinking.

The same astral energy-process and function, which realized spiritual teachers use, can therefore be used for other purposes than spiritual. When the collective time's astral energy-processes are used spiritual, then the Ego, in its egoistic isolating and self-affirmative function, steps aside, and the energy is turned into the Now, and therefore in towards the Source and the spiritual dimension. The people, who around a spiritual teacher, constitute an energy-mandala, are in this way made transparent for a higher common human spirituality.

In the Ego-inflation the contact with, and the ability to manipulate with such collective forms of astral energy, will be used for other purposes than spiritual. It can be creative, Ego-affirmative, political, demonic and so on.

The powers that, by realized spiritual teachers, are given to others' disposal in healing, energy transmission and spiritual information exchange, the same powers can themselves be turned in through the Ego-structures, and therewith into past and future. In this way there can be opened creative channels, created super Egos, created political leaders and popular seducers.

This is a demonical element. It is the same demonical element, which fascinated Milton, Romanticism, Baudelaire, etc. The Devil haunted in them, and around them, just like he haunted in figure of Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as Mefistoteles in Goethe's *Faust*, or as Conchis in John Fowles' *The Magus*.

In acts of war exists the most clear demonical element. There is not so much to misunderstand. No, the misunderstandings take place in the actions, which lie ahead of the war, in which a lot of seduction-art, and therefore thought distortions, are active (as we have seen above). And the archetypical popular seducer is, as already suggested, of course Lucifer (in my article **The philosophy of Karen Blixen** I have investigated all this in depth).

Many gurus seem to have fallen into this temptation. In the story about the temptation in the desert, we can see these possible ways of using the energy pictured in anticipated form. Here you see the possibility of using the freedom and the power, to elevation of the Ego and the consequent power and material glory. But Jesus abstains from this deification of the Ego.

However, many false gurus have fallen for the temptation. And in the present time, where spirituality is blended with management theory - the belief in, that worship of success and winner-mentality, is the same as being in compliance with the universal laws - we will undoubtedly see an explosion of such super Egos – and experiences show, that the world will follow them (see my articles **Management theory and the self-help industry**, and **The New Thought movement and The Law of Attraction**).

New Thought has grown into thousands of little movements in the past 150 years. *The Secret* and *What the Bleep Do We Know?* are just two recent manifestations of what the critical thinker Robert Carroll calls a Hydra-headed monster guarding the gates of wishful thinking, suggestion and self-hypnosis. There have been many others. Some might remember Émile Coué's optimistic mantra therapy. The application of his mantra-like conscious autosuggestion, "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better", is an example of how he thought he could teach people



how to heal themselves. There is also Maxwell Maltz's Psycho-Cybernetics, which teaches people to set the goal of a positive outcome through self-affirmation and mental visualization of that positive outcome. In this he meant there was a connection between mind and body. Both are an example of how the self-help industry is trying to combine the ideals of being healthy, beautiful, a success, a winner, a perfect human being, with self-hypnosis.

But what happens, is that the believers close themselves in the positive; that is: what they *think* is positive: namely ideals of beauty, health, personal power, money, success, perfectionism etc.; shortly said: an ultimative expression of self-centredness. In this way they leave out the negative, which causes a lack of ability to realize, not only the meaning of suffering (which is closely connected with self-realization, heart and compassion – the only true healers), but also the laws of dualism. Their so-called exercises are about how to drive out, force out, repress, even ignore, the negative.

What these teachers don't understand is, that as soon as your thoughts spread themselves too much out in an extreme, the energy-system in the wholeness compensates by seeking to bring itself back to the balance of the middle (like in the teaching of Yin and Yang). The system does this by seeking over towards the opposite extreme (for instance from perfectionism to feeling of fiasco). That is: through a contrabalancing, a compensation. The energy works as a pendulum. The more energy, which is invested in the one extreme of a pair of opposites, the larger the swing in the opposite direction becomes. This is also an example of a true healing power. That is: following these teachers can directly make you sick!

Hypnosis can create an illusoric state, where the conceptions of the roles for the participants in all of these beliefs and behaviors are learned and reinforced in their social settings, which have a quite particular worldview.

If you open yourself for the power of suggestion you close yourself to your spiritual source. This shows in four philosophical ways:

1) A rational where you take your assumptions, conceptions and values for absolute truths (hereunder subjectivism and relativism), and hereby end up in a contradiction between your thoughts and your lived life (spiritual teachers preaching simple life, and living a life in luxury; spiritual teachers, coaches, psychotherapists, etc. etc., who have taken a New Age education that doesn't give any scientific, philosophical and spiritual training; Nonviolent Communicators).

2) A life-philosophical, where you are circling around your own past and future (regression psychotherapies, past/future lives therapy, clairvoyance, astrology,

prophecy, channeling, etc.), and hereby create a closed attitude, inattention, absent-mindedness and ennui.

3) An existence-philosophical, where you in your opinion formation and identity formation strive towards being something else than what you are, where you imitate others, are a slave of others ideas and ideals, and where your actions are characterized by irresoluteness and doubt (Hypnotherapy, Hypnosis, Personal development, Coaching, Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), Large Group Awareness Training, Landmark forum).

4) A spiritual where you are identified with your lifesituation, are dependent on religious or political ideologies, and where you hereby exist on a future salvation (success coaching, Law of Attraction, New Age).

## **Conclusion**

Hypnosis involves intentional manipulation of behavior (which doesn't mean that the practitioners don't have good intentions). As such, hypnotism belongs under the broader rubric of Sophistic "Persuasive Techniques," which work in order to shut down people's critical faculties. The reason why they want to make people quit thinking critically is that they in this way can open them up to behavior modification, and often inducing in them a certain worldview as for example New Age occultism, Regression psychotherapy, or success coaching.

In The Matrix conspiracy as a whole (see my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**) - where the agents consider themselves as authorities on spirituality - there exists an enormous hate towards critical thinking (and therefore truth), and an intense work of getting people to quit thinking critically. It shows in the abusive way critical thinkers are attacked by using thought distortions such as *Back Fire effect*, *Ad hominem move* and *Good intentions bias* (see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**).

As a part of this they use a vocabulary taken from their "techniques"; that is: concepts from therapeutic situations, which should not be applied to public discussions. Besides the fact, that psychologizing Ad hominem moves are irrelevant to what a critical thinker is saying, they are also impermissible, because they involve claiming that the critical thinker has psychological problems of some sort. It shows how psychotherapy today has become an ideology to many people, or, said in another way: that religion in many cases has been reduced to psychology (see my article **Humanistic psychology, self-help, and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**).

It also shows the pernicious consequence for standards of scholarship and intellectual responsibility, which are spreading more and more. The spread of this tendency keeps on surprising me, if not directly shocking me, because critical thinking is a central aspect in a true spiritual practice. Read more about this in my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**

*Further reading where the misuse of hypnosis is explained in detail:*

**The Devastating New Age Turn within Psychotherapy**

**Regression psychotherapies**

*Other related articles:*

**Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**

**The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**

*All articles and books referred to are available in free PDF Versions. Links can be found on my blog: [www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com](http://www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com)*

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