

## Trance and creativity

The experiences that are labelled as “hypnotic” are a part of the mechanism by which human beings make sense of, and survive in, the world. As human beings, we are born with a vast range of innate capacities and propensities which are “hard-wired” into our genetic and biological make-up. These innate resources shape our experience of life. Our senses select a part of the vast range of data by which we are constantly bombarded, and re-organise it into a model of the world that is sufficiently coherent for us to survive in it. In part, this selection is due to physical constraints. Our eyes pick up only that narrow band of the electro-magnetic spectrum between the colours red and violet: anything infra-red or ultra-violet can only be detected by electronic instruments and is invisible to the human eye. With sound, too, our intake from the environment is limited: dogs can easily hear and respond to many sounds outside the range of the human ear. With the exception of the sense of smell, which goes directly to conscious awareness, all the data detected by the senses goes through a “filtering” process in the brain which integrates it into the individual’s model of the world before the conscious mind becomes aware of it.

Thus the individual operates on an individual and subjective model of the world, not on the world itself. A powerful metaphor for this reality is given in the form of the character the Lady of Shalott, a mythical figure invented by Tennyson and inserted into his concept of the Arthurian legends. The Lady of Shalott is a fairy under a curse that prohibits her from looking directly at the world. She is confined to a tower where she sits in front of a mirror, observing reflections of the outside world, and continuously weaves a tapestry (“web”) based on the images she sees in that mirror.

‘But in her web she still delights  
To weave the mirror’s magic sights,  
For often thro’ the silent nights  
A funeral, with plumes and lights  
And music, went to Camelot:  
Or when the moon was overhead,  
Came two young lovers lately wed:  
“I am half sick of shadows,” said  
The Lady of Shalott.’ (1)

The whole of the work of the hypnotherapist comes down to two things: pacing and leading. Pacing is connecting with the client’s individual and subjective model of the world and his or her present state. Leading is communicating with the client so that he or she shifts towards a resourceful state in which he or she can successfully achieve the result he or she is seeking. The client’s internal model of the world changes in accordance with that successful shift. This process of transformation takes place entirely within the client’s subjective, internal world. The hypnotherapist takes no direct part in it: he or she can at most guide the client to the resourceful state in which that transformation takes place.

## Trance as a creative state

The word “trance” covers a multitude of resourceful states, inherent within human beings, by which they are able to draw on inner resources, stored at an unconscious level, in order to develop new and useful ways of dealing with situations they face in life. The conscious mind is aware of from five to nine (i.e.  $7 \pm 2$ ) items of information at any given moment; everything else is stored away at an unconscious level. (2) The term “trance” can be applied to any of the numerous experiences in human life in which the conscious mind is bypassed and unconscious processes temporarily take over, as a means of accessing existing resources stored at an unconscious level and required in a specific situation.

Many exceptional sportsmen have described how their conscious minds seemed to “switch off” and turn to unconscious “auto-pilot” during particularly outstanding sporting achievements. Dr Roger Bannister described how in 1954, when he became the first man to run a mile in less than four minutes, from the half-way stage he had a feeling of ‘complete detachment’. During his powerful performance for Brazil in the 1955 World Cup final, Pele recalled that ‘he played that whole game in a kind of trance.’ Arnold Palmer claimed that there was ‘something spiritual, almost spectral’, about certain rounds of golf: ‘I’d liken it to a sense of reverie – not a dreamlike state, but the somehow insulated state of a great musician in a great performance’. The musician is aware of what he is doing, but his playing is dictated ‘with an internal sense of rightness – it is not merely mechanical, it is not only spiritual; it is something of both, on a different plane and a more remote one.’ (3)

Trance states can arise spontaneously in contexts where they have a survival value. An example is “hysterical fugue”, or the “trance of terror”, in which a person “freezes” and becomes completely immobile in a dangerous situation, in a process triggered at an unconscious level. This capacity is observable in many species, and has obvious survival value. If an animal becomes completely still, then a predator is less likely to notice it; and if the predator does see it, it is likely to assume that it is dead, and therefore pass it by. During the first world war, a number of soldiers, under the overwhelming stress of prolonged trench warfare, either experienced a paralysis of total immobility, or else suddenly walked away behind the lines, where they were found wandering. In the early stages of the war, some of them were court-martialled and shot for desertion. However, later such soldiers were diagnosed as suffering from “shell-shock,” a label applied to the phenomenon of fugue. Dr Halse Rivers, a British Army psychologist, realised that trance was the device by which the unconscious mind could deprive consciousness of the ability to interfere by objecting to a refusal to obey an order to go “over the top”. He wrote that fugue was the way in which the suffer “regains happiness and comfort, if not health, by the recurrence of symptoms which enable him to escape from the conflict in place of facing it.” (4)

In many peacetime situations, too, a manifestation of such paralysis can be found to appear as a way of enabling an individual to deal with a “double bind” situation. Let us take merely one example. Latin Americans live under a rigid cultural code of conduct which demands, among other things, both *machismo* from males and also a strict conformity to family hierarchy, in which, for instance, older brothers take precedence over younger ones. Frequently, one of these values comes into conflict with another.

Latin American culture recognises a number of vague “illnesses” such as *aire*, *empacho*, *espanto*, *mal ojo* and *susto*, which are unknown to conventional medical science but nevertheless fulfil a useful role in dealing with such value conflicts. William Madsen, professor of anthropology at Purdue University, describes an example:

‘Miguel had bragged to members of his *palomilla* [group of close friends] that he would “win over” the affections of Margarita at a Friday dance. He later discovered that his elder brother was interested in the same girl. To retreat from this amatory challenge would be an admission of shortcomings in manhood to his friends. To attempt to take the girl from his brother would be a threat to family solidarity and authority. On the day before the dance, he developed a painful and stiff leg. Within the family, it was diagnosed as *aire*. Miguel had to remain in bed while his brother danced with Margarita.’ (5)

Truly every problem was once a solution.

### **Trance as a creative state**

Perhaps most significantly for the hypnotherapist, trance is a means of accessing the creative faculty that exists within every human being. History, literature and biography are filled with examples in which creative individuals have found solutions to problems which are recognisably applications of self-induced hypnotic trance, even though seldom labelled as such. Socrates would enter trance to listen to the voice of his ‘daemon’. According to Alcibiades, whenever Socrates was preoccupied with problems, he would become entranced for a whole day and night: ‘he then never interrupts his meditation, and forgets to eat and drink and sleep – everything, in short, until his inquiry has reached its termination or, at least, until he has seen some light in it.’ (6)

Many creative individuals have given first-hand accounts of their subjective experiences of the creative process. Mozart would often roll a billiard ball across its table and intently focus his attention on it in order to enter a state of inspiration. In a letter written in about 1789, he described how his compositions would enter his mind fully formed:

‘When I am, as it were, completely myself, entirely alone, and of good cheer...it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly. *Whence* and *how* they come, I know not; nor can I force them. Those pleasures that please me I retain in memory, and am accustomed, as I have been told, to hum them to myself. If I continue in this way, it soon occurs to me how I may turn this or that morsel to account, so as to make a good dish of it, that is to say, agreeably to the rules of counterpoint, to the peculiarities of the various instruments, etc.

‘All this fires my soul, and, provided I am not disturbed, my subject enlarges itself, becomes methodized and defined, and the whole, though it be long, stands almost complete and finished in my mind, so that I can survey it, like a fine picture or a beautiful statue, at a glance. Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them, as it were, all at once (*gleich alles zusammen*). What a delight this is I cannot tell! All this inventing, this producing, takes place in a pleasing lively dream....When I proceed to write down my ideas, I take out of the bag of my memory, if I may use that

phrase, what has been previously collected into it in the way I have mentioned. For this reason the committing to paper is done quickly enough, for everything is, as I have said before, already finished; and it rarely differs on paper from what it was in my imagination.’ (7)

In a letter written in 1878, Tchaikovsky described a similar experience of inspiration:

‘Generally speaking, the germ of a future composition comes suddenly and unexpectedly. If the soil is ready – that is to say, if the disposition for work is there – it takes root with extraordinary force and rapidity, shoots up through the earth, puts forth branches, leaves and, finally, blossoms. I cannot define the creative process in any other way than by this simile. The great difficulty is that the germ must appear at a favourable moment, the rest goes of itself. It would be vain to try to put into words that immeasurable sense of bliss which comes over me directly a new idea awakens in me and begins to assume a definite form. I forget everything and behave like a madman. Everything within me starts pulsing and quivering; hardly have I begun the sketch ere one thought follows another. In the midst of this magic process it frequently happens that some external interruption wakes me from my somnambulistic state: a ring at the bell, the entrance of my servant, the striking of the clock, reminding me that it is time to leave off....It is already a great thing if the main ideas and general outline of a work come without any racking of brains, as the result of that supernatural and inexplicable force we call inspiration.’ (8)

The dancer and choreographer Mary Wigman described how her dance compositions arose spontaneously from within:

‘[T]he fundamental idea of any creation arises in me or, rather, out of me as a completely independent dance theme. This theme, however primitive or obscure at first, already contains its own development and alone dictates its singular and logical sequence. What I feel as the germinal source of any dance may be compared perhaps to the melodic or rhythmic “subject” as it is first perceived by a composer, or to the compelling image that haunts a poet....Each dance is unique and free, a separate organism whose form is self-determined....My *Pastorale* was developed in the following way: I came into my studio one day and sank down with a feeling of complete relaxation. Out of a sense of deepest peace and quietude I began to slowly to move my arms and body. Calling to my assistants I said, “I do not know if anything will come of this feeling, but I should like a reed instrument that would play over and over again a simple little tune, not at all important, always the same one.” Then with the monotonous sound of the little tune, with its gentle lyric suggestion, the whole dance took form. Afterwards we found that it was built on six-eighths time, neither myself nor the musician being conscious of the rhythm until we came to the end.’ (9)

Amy Lowell described how her poems came into her conscious awareness having already largely formed at an unconscious level:

‘In answering the question, How are poems made? my instinctive answer is a flat ‘I don’t know.’ It makes not the slightest difference that the question as asked me refers solely to my own poems, for I know as little of how they are made as I do of any one else’s. What I do know about them is only a millionth part of what there must be to know. I meet them where they touch consciousness, and that is already a considerable distance along the road of evolution....

‘Sometimes the external stimulus which has produced a poem is known or can be traced. It may be a sight, a sound, a thought, or an emotion. Sometimes the consciousness has no record of the initial impulse, which has either been forgotten or springs from a deep, unrealized memory. But whatever it is, emotion, apprehended or hidden, is a part of it, for only emotion can rouse the subconscious into action. How carefully and precisely the subconscious mind functions, I have often been a witness to in my own work. An idea will come into my head for no apparent reason; ‘The Bronze Horses,’ for instance. I registered the horses as a good subject for a poem; and, having so registered them, I consciously thought no more about the matter. But what I had really done was to drop my subject into the subconscious, much as one drops a letter into the mail-box. Six months later, the words of the poem began to come into my head, the poem – to use my private vocabulary – was ‘there.’...

‘Long poems are apt to take months preparing in the subconscious mind; in the case of short poems, the period of subconscious gestation may be a day or an instant, or any time in between. Suddenly words are there, and there with a imperious insistence which brooks no delay....

‘The first thing I do when I am conscious of the coming of a poem is to seek paper and pencil. It seems as though the simple gazing at a piece of blank paper hypnotized me into an awareness of the subconscious....This state of semi-trance is not surprising when we think of short poems; what is curious is that the trancelike state can hold over interruptions in the case of long poems.’ (10)

The writer Katherine Anne Porter described her own experience of creativity as follows:

‘Perhaps in time I shall learn to live more deeply and consistently in that undistracted center of being where the will does not intrude, and the sense of time passing is lost, or has no power over the imagination. Of the three dimensions of time, only the past is “real” in the absolute sense that it has occurred, the future is only a concept, and the present is that fateful split second in which all action takes place. One of the most disturbing habits of the human mind is its wilful and destructive forgetting of whatever in its past does not flatter or confirm its present point of view. I must very often refer far back in time to seek the meaning or explanation of today’s smallest event, and I have long since lost the power to be astonished at what I find there. This constant exercise of memory seems to be the chief occupation of my mind, and all my experience seems to be simply memory, with continuity, marginal notes, constant revision and comparison of one thing with another. Now and again thousands of memories converge, harmonize, arrange themselves around a central idea in a coherent form, and I write a story.’ (11)

Breakthroughs in the sciences, too, have been achieved in such creative states. F.A. von Kekulé, professor of chemistry in Ghent, described to a group of scientists how in 1865 he achieved an insight which led to the discovery of the benzene ring, the fact that the molecules of certain organic compounds are closed chains or 'rings', rather than open structures:

'I turned my chair to the fire and dozed....Again the atoms were gambolling before my eyes. This time the smaller groups kept modestly in the background. My mental eye, rendered more acute by repeated visions of this kind, could now distinguish larger structures, of manifold conformation; long rows, sometimes more closely fitted together; all twining and twisting in snakelike motion. But look! What was that? One of the snakes had seized hold of its own tail, and the form whirled mockingly before my eyes. As if by a flash of lightning I awoke....Let us learn to dream, gentlemen.' (12)

In 1908, the mathematician Henri Poincaré described how he achieved a solution to the problem of the Fuchsian functions, a hitherto unsolved mathematical problem:

'Most striking at first is this appearance of sudden illumination, a manifest sign of long, unconscious prior work....These sudden inspirations...never happen except after some days of voluntary effort which has appeared absolutely fruitless and whence nothing good seems to have come, where the way taken seems totally astray. These efforts then have not been as sterile as one thinks; they have set agoing the unconscious machine and without them it would not have moved and would have produced nothing....[T]he subliminal self is in no way inferior to the conscious self; it is not purely automatic; it is capable of discernment; it has tact, delicacy; it knows how to choose, to divine....It knows better how to divine than the conscious self, since it succeeds where that has failed....[T]he privileged unconscious phenomena, those susceptible of becoming conscious, are those which, directly or indirectly, affect most profoundly our emotional sensibility.' (13)

The essence of creativity is the co-ordination of the left side of the brain, which is associated with logical reasoning and abstraction and the right side of the brain which is associated with emotions, metaphor and relational thinking. The disciplines of chemistry and mathematics are generally considered to be "left-brain" activities. Yet here we see that a conceptual breakthrough in chemistry derives from a metaphorical communication from the unconscious – the image of a snake seizing its own tail – and a breakthrough in mathematics arises from attaching "emotional sensibility" to certain concepts.

Dostoyevsky wrote an account of his experience as a political prisoner in a gaol in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russia. A member of the upper classes, he was surrounded by violent, drunken, noisy peasant fellow-inmates, whom he initially despised. However, he entered a creative state of introspection in which his unconscious mind formed a solution:

'Little by little I lost myself in reverie and imperceptibly sank into memories of the past. All through my four years in prison I continually thought of all my past days, and I think I relived the whole of my former life in my memories. These memories arose in my mind of themselves; rarely did I summon them up consciously. They would begin from a

certain point, some little thing that was often barely perceptible, and then bit by bit they would grow into a finished picture, some strong and complete impression. I would analyze these impressions, adding new touches to things experienced long ago; and the main thing was that I would refine them, continually refine them, and in this consisted my entire entertainment. This time, for some reason, I suddenly recalled a moment of no apparent significance from my early childhood when I was only nine years old, a moment that I thought I had completely forgotten.'

He recalled that he was alone in a forest and thought wrongly that he was being chased by a wolf. A kindly peasant named Marey (a 50-year old man) had rescued and comforted him.

'[N]ow, suddenly, twenty years later, in Siberia, I remembered that encounter so vividly, right down to the last detail. That means it had settled unnoticed in my heart, all by itself with no will of mine, and had suddenly come back to me at a time when it was needed.'

This experience causes a complete "reframe" of his attitude towards his fellow-prisoners:

'I suddenly felt I could regard these unfortunates in an entirely different way and that suddenly, through some sort of miracle, the former hatred and anger in my heart had vanished. This disgraced peasant, with shaven head and brands on his cheek, drunk and roaring out his hoarse, drunken song – why he might also be that very same Marey; I cannot peer into his heart, after all.' (14)

These accounts describes an innate human faculty – the ability to access resources which are stored at an unconscious level and bring them out into a new configuration which brings about a solution that enables the individual to deal with a particular situation. Without once using the words "hypnosis" or "trance" – except in the case of Amy Lowell – they describe precisely the process which takes place during effective hypnotherapy – or self-hypnosis. Hypnotherapists will recognise numerous features from these descriptions. The attention is focused on a specific point – which could be external (as with Mozart's billiard ball) or internal (as with Dostoyevsky's memories). When the solution comes into conscious awareness, it appears suddenly and complete, thus demonstrating that a great deal of mental processing has been taking place at an unconscious level: Mozart "heard" his compositions "all at once", as if time itself had been transcended. As the creative process is difficult to describe precisely, Mozart uses the metaphor of cooking, and Tchaikovsky that of a growing tree or plant, to describe it. Note that each individual did not know precisely what insight would arise as a result of his or her introspection: he or she simply entered a creative state and the unconscious spontaneously came up with a complete solution.

It is precisely tapping into the client's faculty of creativity, and enabling him or her to enter an authentic creative state in which a solution arises spontaneously that is the essence of effective hypnotherapy. The "action" in hypnotherapy takes place entirely within the client. As Dr Milton Erickson explained:

‘[T]he hypnotized person remains the same person. His or her behavior only is altered by the trance state, but even so, that altered behavior derives from the life experience of the patient and not from the therapist. At the most the therapist can influence only the manner of self-expression.’ (15)

The effective hypnotherapist therefore takes an attitude of “standing back” – both literally and metaphorically – from the client’s internal processing. It is essential to allow the client the “space” in which to develop his or her solution - spontaneously and in a way unique to that individual client - at an unconscious level. The client already has the resources within which are necessary to achieve that solution, and the hypnotherapist’s task is to lead that client to the creative state where that solution emerges just as authentically as in the first-hand accounts above.

At the beginning of the session, the hypnotherapist cannot know what that solution is, and the client is likely to have - at most - only a vague awareness of that solution at a conscious level. However, the hypnotherapist does know that the client possesses vast positive resources at an unconscious level which can be drawn upon to bring together the “raw materials” with which the client’s unconscious mind will work to build that solution. Actual memories of successful functioning in the area in which the client is seeking that solution are the first line of resources which the hypnotherapist seeks. On the subject of pain control, for example, Dr Erickson wrote:

‘An effective anesthesia is better induced, for example, by initiating a train of mental activity within the patient himself by suggesting that he recall the feeling of numbness experienced after a local anesthetic, or after a leg or arm went to sleep, and then suggesting that he can now experience a similar feeling in his hand. By such an indirect suggestion the patient is enabled to go through those difficult inner processes of disorganizing, reorganizing, reassociating, and projecting of inner real experience to meet the requirements of the suggestion, and thus the induced anesthesia becomes a part of his experiential life.’ (16)

These real memories within the client – which are stored not merely in the brain, but also in the muscles, the organs and throughout the body - are powerful resources which the hypnotherapist should aim to access as early in the session as possible. Dr Erickson had the misfortune of being struck down by two types of polio – once in his late teens and once in middle age. In an interview with the psychologist Ernest Rossi, he described how he used self-hypnosis to access the memories needed to successfully recover from the first attack of polio:

R: What were your first experiences in coping with your own muscle difficulties and pain? How did you learn to do it? Did someone train you in autohypnosis?

E: I learned by myself. I can recall how I approached using a microscope. If you really want to see through the microscope and you want to draw what you are seeing, you keep both eyes open. You look with one eye and you draw with the other.

R: What’s that got to do with autohypnosis?

E: You don’t see anything else.

R: You only see what is relevant for your task and block out everything else. It's that aspect of selective perception that enables you to recognize the altered state of autohypnosis. How did you cope with pain at that time?

E: One of my first efforts was to learn relaxation and building up my strength. I made chains out of rubber bands so I could pull against certain resistances. I went through that every night and all the exercises I could. Then I learned I could walk to induce fatigue to get rid of the pain. *Slowly I learned that if I could think about walking and fatigue and relaxation, I could get relief.*

R: Thinking about walking and fatigue was just as effective in producing pain relief as the actual physical process?

E: Yes, it became effective in reducing pain.

R: In your self-rehabilitative experiences between the ages of 17 and 19 you learned from your own experience that you could use your imagination to achieve the same effects as an actual physical effort.

E: An *intense memory* rather than imagination. You remember how something tastes, you know how you get a certain tingle from peppermint. As a child I used to climb a tree in a wood lot and then jump from one tree to another like a monkey. I would recall the many different twists and turns I made in order to find out what are the movements you make when you have full muscles.

R: You activated real memories from childhood in order to learn just how much muscle control you had left and how to reacquire that control.

E: Yes, you use real memories. At 18 I recalled all my childhood movements to help myself relearn muscle coordination. [Erickson now recalls how he spent much time and effort remembering the sensations of swimming, the feeling of water rushing past the different muscles of the body, etc.]

R: This could be a way of facilitating autohypnosis by having people go into their sense memories. This would activate autonomous sensory responses that are an aspect of autohypnotic behavior: not imagination but real sense memories.

E: As you watch Buster Keaton in a movie teetering on the edge of a building, you can feel your own muscles tense up.

R: The movie or pure imagination provides an associative pathway to your own sense memories, which you then actually experience in the form of muscle tension.' (17)

Here we see the essence of the utilisation approach to hypnotherapy. Each step drew on actual experiences from Erickson's life. He gained the fixation of attention on one point – the first step in self-hypnosis - by recalling the act of looking through a microscope. Likewise, it is more effective for a hypnotherapist, in inducing trance with a client, to find some internal positive memory from the client's experience as an object of fixation, rather than use any external object, such as a swinging watch, pen, hypno-disc or other item unfamiliar to the client.

Erickson remembered actual sense memories of the way his body had successfully functioned before the onset of polio rather than merely imagining what such successful functioning would be like. In the same way, the hypnotherapist should first seek equivalent memories of successful functioning within the client, as these are always more real and therapeutically valuable than anything that the hypnotherapist might ask the client to imagine. However, imaginary experiences undoubtedly have a corresponding

physiological effect. We relate such experiences to ourselves, as Erickson's example of Buster Keaton shows. Another demonstration of that principle was with the film *Lawrence of Arabia* (UK, 1962, directed by David Lean), which featured lengthy scenes of Lawrence and his men suffering in the desert heat in widescreen Technicolor. Cinemas reported record sales in soft drinks after screenings of that film.

### **Lessons for hypnotherapists**

Within the context of a hypnotherapy session, the central feature of the trance state is that it is a means of accessing the client's creative faculty. This creativity, operating at an unconscious level, draws on the vast treasure trove of innate faculties, memories, experiences, influences, fantasies and other internal resources, to develop a solution which will enable the client to achieve the goal that he or she is seeking from the session. Neither the client - at least at a conscious level - nor the hypnotherapist knows exactly what that solution will turn out to be. The hypnotherapist's central task is guide the client towards a context in which the latter's creative capacity is mobilised in order to develop that solution at an unconscious level.

Therefore, in approaching the induction of trance, the most valuable service the therapist can provide is to access the client's creative faculty – to find a situation from the client's experience which is equivalent to the creative states described in the quotations above. Everybody has a creative faculty, and an outlet for it, even if is not always quite as obvious as in Mozart or Tchaikovsky. The hypnotherapist's task is to locate that creativity within the client and mobilise it.

In some cases, the client's creative faculty is very much "on the surface" in that he or she works in a creative field. If the client is a professional or semi-professional artist, musician, writer, actor or similar, then it is a simple task to ask him or her to recall a creative trance similar to those mentioned in the quotations above, and ask him or her to let that creative faculty develop a solution in the form of a painting, or a piece of music (perhaps with lyrics), or a piece of writing or a theatrical or film performance – all taking place in the client's imagination. Many other occupations use creativity in their work. For example, if the client works in advertising, a useful approach can be to invite the client to recall the process of creating an advertisement, whether in print, on television or on the radio, and ask how he or she would create an advertisement in the same medium which would "sell" the client's conscious mind on, say, becoming and staying a non-smoker, or taking the actions which would enable him or her to lose weight, or whatever the goal is that the client is seeking. However, a word of caution is in order here. Many people dislike their jobs – often intensely. Be aware that in such a case, your talking about the client's job is likely to bring about a negative, defensive and resentful state – precisely what you do not want the client to experience. So tread warily when approaching the whole area of the client's employment. If you notice any sign from the client's physiology that the direction of the therapy is resulting in such an unresourceful state, then change direction immediately towards what is - from the client's point of view - more comfortable ground.

If the client has some hobby or interest which provides an outlet for the creative faculty, use that as the starting-point for trance induction. Such a hobby or interest might include music, painting, gardening, embroidery, cooking, a sport, fixing up old car

engines, video-making, or countless others. In each case we are talking about an active process, in which the client, for instance, actually creates or performs music or grows his or her own garden. Invite the client to recall a particularly pleasing experience with whatever his or her hobby might be. Use that as the pathway to the client's creativity. Here you are on exceptionally strong ground. The client is focussing on his or her own enthusiasm – something he or she happily does for hour after hour with intense pleasure. It is an activity which invokes the creative faculty spontaneously. The hypnotherapist merely paces that particular manifestation of creativity and leads the client towards applying that same creativity to achieving the solution the client is seeking.

In the event that the client has no such hobby or interest, it is still the case that his or her creativity finds an outlet passively. Even if he or she does not make music, he or she may listen to other people's. If he or she does not play sport, he or she may well enjoy watching other people play sport. Even if the client has no hobby or interest other than watching television, he or she is still internally "creating" the emotions associated with a drama, soap opera, situation comedy or other television programme. At least that is a way of accessing creativity, albeit in a passive way. In any event, there will always be an opening to the client's creative faculty. In the case of a young person who spends hours on end playing computer games on science fiction themes, you can pace the experience of fascination with playing that game and lead the client towards a solution by inviting him to experience different resources in symbolic form as digital characters – aliens, robots, space pilots and so on - in a computer game, achieving a solution within the context of such an imaginary game.

It is the emotions derived from creative experiences – such as fascination, enthusiasm, pleasure, pride in accomplishment – that are the driving force that leads towards unconscious creativity. The hypnotherapist's task is to enable the client to direct that emotional force towards those inner resources which the creative faculty is mobilising, in order to achieve the result he or she is seeking. While of course remaining intently aware of the client's external communications, the hypnotherapist must always remember to preserve a certain "distance" from the client. Once the creative process has been mobilised, it is essential to "stand back" and let that process take place without interference.

At the heart of the hypnotherapeutic process is a mystery – a process of incomparable complexity by which the unconscious mind draws from the client's vast internal resources to find a solution. This is the creative process. But finding the doorway to that creative process is not a mystery: the hypnotherapist's task is to lead the client to that doorway and open it – and then step back and let that process happen.

**The above article is based on a talk given at the annual conference of the National Council for Hypnotherapy in Walsall in 2004.**

- (1) Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott" (1832, revised 1842), in Helen Gardner (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1950*, Oxford University Press, London, 1972, p. 638.
- (2) G. Miller, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two" (1956) in George Miller, *The Psychology of Communication*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1968, pp. 21-50.
- (3) All three quoted in Brian Inglis, *Trance*, Paladin/Grafton Books, London, 1989, pp. 9-10.
- (4) Quoted in *ibid*, p. 149.
- (5) William Madsen, "Value Conflicts and Folk Psychotherapy in South Texas" (1957-62), in Ari Kiev (ed.), *Magic, Faith and Healing*, Free Press/Macmillan, New York, 1964, p. 431.
- (6) Quoted in Inglis, *op cit*, p. 10.
- (7) W.A. Mozart, "A Letter" (c. 1789), trans. E. Holmes, in P.E. Vernon (ed.), *Creativity*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1970, pp. 55-56.
- (8) P.I. Tchaikovsky, "Letters" (1878), trans. R. Newmarch, in *ibid*, pp. 57-58.
- (9) Mary Wigman, "Composition in pure movement" (1946), in Brewster Ghiselin (ed), *The Creative Process*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1952, pp. 74-76.
- (10) Amy Lowell, "The process of making poetry" (1930), in *ibid*, pp. 110-112.
- (11) K.A. Porter, "Notes on writing" (1936), in *ibid*, pp. 206-207.
- (12) Quoted in Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, Hutchinson, London, 1964, p. 118.
- (13) H. Poincaré, "Mathematical Creation" (1908), trans. G. Halstead, in Vernon, *op cit*, pp. 77-88.
- (14) Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, vol. 1 (1873-78), trans. Kenneth Lantz, Quartet Books/Namara, London, 1994, pp. 351-355.
- (15) M. Erickson, "Hypnotic Psychotherapy" (1948), in Milton Erickson, *Collected Papers on Hypnosis* (edited by Ernest Rossi), Irvington, New York, 1980, vol. 4, p. 38.
- (16) *Ibid*, pp. 38-39.
- (17) M. Erickson and E. Rossi, "Autohypnotic Experiences", in Erickson, *op cit*, vol. 1, pp. 112-113. Italics and brackets in original.