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HYPNOSIS

USE OF HYPNOSIS IN ART TODAY

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“Now life was to be charted, and ignorance and superstition never to shake the bastions of science again. Perhaps their arrogance became too pronounced, and their persistent denial of the spiritual. For it is as if the cold and damp have returned”

Opening Sequence of *Riget* (1994) by Lars von Trier

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FOREWORD

My main motivation for finding new information, go to exhibitions, watch movies, listen to music, travel or talk to random people is to better understand that one thing we all know first hand and yet can never share in full with anyone: *The Personal Experience*. The study of this has had a philosophical term since early 20th century when Husserl introduced *phenomenology* as “the reflective study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view”¹, but it is a study that has been practiced, with or without the name, for many centuries². Today the study of consciousness is not only a philosophical issue, but a cross-disciplinary field drawing lots of people to it. It only comes natural that art should also be seen in relation to what is happening there... I find it fascinating that no matter *what* we decide to investigate, we cannot detach any study or experience from the fact that we experience it in a certain *way* conditioned by our inborn facilities as humans. This is what this thesis is about and this is the essence of what my work is concerned with.

Within this embodied phenomenological interest (how we physically experience phenomena) I have narrowed down the paper to one specific *way* of experiencing: through *hypnosis*. Maybe you just in a flash imagined a person acting silly on stage after being “put under” by

a hypnotist wearing a cape, but as we shall see that *hypnosis* can mean many other things as well. We're going to investigate the terminology of hypnosis in general and see how different artists are using hypnosis in their practice.

Throughout this paper, please keep in mind that the choices I've made of what to bring in are not arbitrary in any means, they are highly selective, and I am aware that they reflect my biases, my particular tastes and my own blind spots. Especially the fact that I come with a scandinavian (mostly danish) point of view will be present. Writing it in this way seem to better fit the topic, as hypnosis lands in that misty zone between science, illusion and esotericism and does not have a place in a completely academic/scientific container of a traditional thesis.

The notes in the end are quite essential to the full experience of this paper and I strongly suggest that you have a device close by so you can directly access the media references for the full experience. If you are reading the printed version, I recommend that you go to the web page <http://moelbergmeyer.com/writing/hypnosisnotes/>, where I have put all the notes with interactive links, so you don't have to flip back and forth all the time (especially for the third part of the paper.

Now get in a relaxed position and when you're in your optimal mindset for reading, please continue.

ABSTRACT

The first part of the paper is about defining hypnosis. The aim is to make you aware of the discussion within the circle of people who use hypnosis on an everyday basis in our contemporary (and western) society. This more or less theoretical walkthrough of how we understand hypnosis, is written with the intention of establishing some common ground for *why* artists would use hypnosis in their practice... Many of the questions directed at the artists are the same questions that normally come with hypnosis anywhere else: *How does our mind and body work together? Who is in control? How do we understand experience? How do we make sense of it? Is it real? What is real?*

In the second part we will take a look at two artists who have used hypnosis in their practice. Matt Mullican (US) as the first, being a pioneer of hypnosis and an artist dealing with consciousness and how we understand reality. The subjectivity of reality is an important focus throughout the whole paper. The second artist is Lea Porsager (DK). I will present and discuss some specific works of hers and in the end of this part draw make a comparative analysis of the two artists. Now that we understand the *what* and *how* of hypnosis from the first chapter the centre-point of the discussion will be *why* they use hypnosis: What does it mean to use hypnotism in an art practice and how do artists utilise it?

In the third part, we will move towards alternate realities. The strategies displayed by both artists introduced will be discussed, especially focusing on the *self*. Esotericism and occultism will be discussed and some perspective will be put on this in relation to hypnosis. In this discussion thoughts will fly far and quick and this will serve as an introduction to the fourth part.

The last segment is a synthesis more than a conclusion. I will propose some possible answers to why hypnosis had become attractive to use for an artist in contemporary culture today.

PART 1

HYPNOSIS

- IS IT REAL?
- TRANCE, RAPPORT AND SUGGESTION
- THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING HYPNOSIS

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*YOU KNOW WHAT? YOU'RE A FAKE CUNT! YOU'RE A FUCKING
FAKE CUNT!*

That Person

X

HYPNOSIS

In the theory of Tad James' book, *Hypnosis, A Comprehensive Guide* (2000) the *mind* is connected with the *body* and that there is a division between the *unconscious mind* and the *conscious mind*. This is the typical foundation for understanding hypnosis. He emphasises that actually the mind is one, but that the division is made to easier understand how the mind operates. When using the word *unconscious* it is not meant as in knocked out, asleep or dead, but as your automatic and/or uncontrollable bodily functions (the autonomic nervous system, etc.). The promise of hypnosis is, in short, that you can establish a connection to the unconscious via trance and become able to e.g. heal yourself. This is the reason why its practice has become partly known as a therapeutical tool today. I am not so interested in the therapeutic aspects of hypnosis, but the idea that you can utilise your body functions by establishing a connection between your conscious and unconscious mind through trance is essential to the understanding of hypnosis: This is what it is about.

Is it Real?

This is a returning question when I have talked to people while

researching the topic: Is hypnosis real? Are people in trance faking it or are they *really* in a trance? Tad James addresses this question already in the introduction of his book. He answers with another question: What is Real? Consciousness is ‘unreal’ in the sense that we cannot measure it³. True, we can measure bodily functions and mechanics (like awareness) when looking at the brain, but all in all we still have no lab observations giving a solution to “the hard” problem of why and how consciousness is there in the first place⁴. Yet without any measurement, we do not question the reality of a subjective conscious experience. Consciousness defines our reality, so if you alter consciousness you alter the experience of what you classify as real (this is the thesis of hypnosis). Before I open pandoras box of the consciousness debate, let’s get back to the question... What is then real? An important thing to understand about the reality of hypnosis is what James’ calls *the lesson of the shaman*: That none of the world around us is real, which he calls *the unreality of reality*. To accept the potential of hypnosis is to be open to this idea that *all is in the mind* and that everything therefore has an unreality to it. Descartes comes to mind. To ask the question of whether someone is under hypnosis or not is equal to asking do you *think* you’re under hypnosis or not. “If a client says, “You can’t hypnotize me!” he is right. He is the only person who can hypnotize himself.”⁵ Showman Derren Brown does not deal with clients, but he provocatively uses the word

“subject” when giving a piece of advice about hypnosis⁶: “Your subject should ideally be open to what happens — they don’t have to believe in hypnosis — not too nervous, but not bouncily enthusiastic either. Bear in mind that you’re not really inducing a special state, though you’ll talk as if you are. Instead you’re utilising the spectators expectations and beliefs”⁷ Now we are introduced to the *trance state* and this is where a lot of confusion lies. Sceptics want to know where this trance state is and how to measure it, but ‘trance’ as Brown puts it, doesn’t *really* exist. It is a term which covers many, many things.

X

I've used the word fake quite often, I did that to get it out of the way because that seems to be what everyone wants to see, is it real or is it not real, is he faking, how is this happening, what's happening here, and so it all becomes a test for them. It would be much easier if it wasn't a test and they were just like okay this is a body of work that we're seeing and dah, dah, dah and what happens happens, but it's never like that.

Matt Mullican

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Trance, Rapport and Suggestion

So how do the people dealing with hypnosis define this trance state, which is not *really* there? James describes trance ambiguously as “the state in which hypnosis takes place”⁸. Examples of light trances could be watching television (you’re having a full conversation with the person next to you while watching television... Suddenly you turn to the other person and say, ‘What...?’ — you missed the last three sentences) or driving a car (you’re driving on an open road; the sun is setting; the radio is on; the sound of the engine gently creates a rhythm — at some point you see a road sign and realised you missed your exit by 20 km). These examples might be involuntary trance states where you *zone out* for a while. Trance states are natural and we get into them all the time according to James.

The second aspect of hypnosis is what is called *to be in rapport with the subject of your trance* (a close and harmonious relationship)⁹. In the light trance states it might be rapport with your television or what is going on outside framed by the window. In traditional hypnosis the rapport is established first with the hypnotist (or a tool he uses; think of a pendulum for instance) to be able to open up to the unconscious mind. Through the unconscious you can access your normally inaccessible body functions and change your experience through *suggestions*

from outside (from the hypnotist). “Rapport is the basis for success in hypnotherapy. It is the condition in which the client accepts our suggestions unconditionally, without resistance, at the Unconscious level. This enables the client to make the changes he wants to make. Rapport opens the door to trance, the state in which we can talk directly with the client’s Unconscious Mind.”¹⁰

Now we’re getting to the utility of hypnosis. We know now about trance and rapport being special states of mind and focus. When both have been achieved, *suggestibility* is optimally heightened. This term covers how open you are to embody suggestions given by the hypnotist or thing you are in rapport with; this could be statements to accept or non-veridical experiences (hallucinations). James concurs to Brown’s statement that when you’re in hypnosis you will not accept suggestions that are not consistent with your beliefs and values¹¹¹². Suggesting is a technique of direct language, subliminal language and body language. There are many techniques for this the most popular ones being the Ericksonian method (Milton H. Erickson introduced a non-authoritarian suggesting) and NLP (NeuroLinguistic Programming which is subliminal messaging embedded in ambiguous language). The skilled hypnotist will first convince you that you’re in a trance and then make you believe that you act on suggestions. A technique to convince you that you’re in a trance state can be to suggest things you eventually

do automatically (e.g. blinking your eyes or changing position in your chair). This makes it seem like the hypnotist caused the automatic actions to happen. From there, when you believe that the hypnotist is in control and accepts this, *suggestibility tests* can be made to cement the confirmation of the trance state. A commonly used test in stage hypnosis is *arm catalepsy* (where all muscles in your arms tighten, making it impossible for you to move it). Now the person is *under*.

The Problem of Defining Hypnosis

For parts of the society of medical hypnotherapists, *suggestibility* is a core element for defining hypnosis in order to certify it as a science. Suggestibility can be measured before, under and after hypnosis. Besides that term, *hypnotisability* is used as a scale for the effectiveness of hypnosis. This covers how easy a person can establish rapport, accept the trance state and obtain the desirable suggestibility level (this you will also see in stage shows. Normally several people will be asked to do a simple task like staring at something and the skilled hypnotist can from this tell if the hypnotisability of the people). While it seems that there is a consensus on hypnosis being an altered state of mind, amongst people working with it, there is not a *one* definition of it. In 2011 the Advanced Workshop in Experimental

Hypnosis was held as part of a joint annual conference of the British Society of Medical and Dental Hypnosis (BSMDH) and the British Society of Experimental and Clinical Hypnosis (BSECH)¹³. The topic of discussion was how to define hypnosis and a report came out of it. Considered by most to be the ‘best’ definition was an older one by John Kihlstrom which goes: “Hypnosis may be defined as a social interaction in which one person, designated the subject, responds to suggestions offered by another person, designated the hypnotist, for experiences involving alterations in perception, memory, and voluntary action”¹⁴. This definition is broad and rather ambiguous. It defines hypnosis as a *domain* of characteristic phenomena, central to which is suggestion. Like the problem with consciousness and reality, an ambiguous definition makes it almost impossible to empirically research the phenomenon, which is why medical hypnotherapists are in favour of a more narrow term. The broad definition is partly a criticism of the narrow definition, which primarily is concerned with the mechanisms of the altered state and its correlation to suggestibility in general. The aim of such a definition is to locate and operationalise the measurable altered state of consciousness. To approach it like this would make the altered state the defining element of hypnosis and leave out the hypnotherapist of the equation. This would create a third definition of hypnosis which is merely the altered state. You don’t have to choose

one of the definitions, but be aware in the following discussion that hypnosis covers all!

PART 2

THE MYTH OF MATT MULLICAN

- HYPNOSIS AS EMPATHIC TOOL

TRANSCENDING THE SELF: LP

The Myth of Matt Mullican

Considered to be one of the pioneers of concrete use of hypnosis in modern art, Matt Mullican started out in the 70s with shows resembling the hypnosis practice of a stage performer. In New York, 1978, he had three actors *put under* and then perform *Details from an Imaginary Life (from Life to Death)*. This piece he had written, some years earlier, while dealing with the distinction/non-distinction between reality and imagination (the project around the stick figure named *Glen*). The show itself caused some controversy as it allegedly was perceived by some as a “psychodrama” in the media¹⁵. Mullican was accused of being a control freak and a manipulator, which made him decide only to go under himself in all future performances.

Since then he continued working with hypnosis and created a kind of a myth around his performances. *That Person*, as he calls himself when he performs while in trance, is an anonymous person: “It’s not a single person, but it’s *that person*. It’s not a he. It’s not a she. It’s not a young. It’s not an old. It’s that person. It’s a person on the street that you do not know”¹⁶. *That Person*’s actions on stage are repetitive and governed by routines. In some performances *That Person* gets out of bed in the beginning and goes to bed in the end. Sometimes tape is put on the floor to set the boundaries for a field almost.

Generic patterns are created by drawing; always the same as whole, but a little different each time. *That Person* has Tourettes Syndrome like behaviour, where *it* bursts out obscurities and sounds (see the quotes stated earlier). I'm describing this to you, so you get a *feel* for what's going on when you experience it. Empathy is very important for Mullican's work. If you are not familiar with his performances, I recommend that you at least go online and find a clip where he performs. Now ¹⁷.

Hypnosis as Empathic Tool

Did you find the clip? As you can see, it is pretty awkward. You are watching something you are probably not really interested in seeing (a grown man rolling on the floor yelling). My immediate feelings were of slight discomfort mixed with some irritation. I rationalise that my discomfort arrives from the fact that I *feel* the shame, he *should* be feeling. The irritation comes intuitively for me when someone really *acts* (when it is just a bit too much). I've never witnessed a performance of him live, but I imagine it to be some very long minutes to endure. In a talk given at MoMA, he brings in an anecdote from a situation in Zürich Kunsthalle: everyone including the director had left the institution before he had gotten out of the trance state after the

performance. When he later met the director at dinner, he says that she (along with the rest) had needed to instantly digest the experience and therefore had left right away (whether that was said out of politeness or not, we do not know). How Mullican describes this himself is that “there is an empathetic response and when you see a performance like that live, *you feel it* and it’s troubling; It’s embarrassing.”¹⁸

Empathy seems to be the red thread in his body of work. From the early works on *Glen* (the Stick Figure), whom he presented as *real* and not just an object; a doodle on piece of paper. When he started performing, still at CalARTS, he used a corpse as a prop, referring to it both as *him* and *it*, putting his hand in its mouth and yelling at it. All the works are displaying how we through speech and specific ways of approaching collections of matter (by labelling it *things*, *people* or *objects*) disembody them, even though we always embody *things* through our experience. We perceive and thereby feel it in ourselves and in that way even things transcend their label in become intertwined with us. That is empathy (or sometimes affect) and it is part of our conscious experience of the world: the ability to feel the other (also the stick figure and the dead corpse as we project subject status onto them). Enforcing this thesis, Mullican stops being *someone* and turns himself into *That Person* when in hypnosis — he de-personifies himself, in order to shift focus to the (real) *someones* watching the artificial thing (*That Person*).

The audience is still watching a man though, and the use of hypnosis suggests that he is not even acting, which heightens empathy. That is why it is effective.

Understanding the empathy-agenda, hypnosis can be seen as a strategy to change/manipulate the audience's expectations to what he shows and thereby *modus of comprehension*¹⁹. If he would present his performances about *That Person* as a theatre play, expectations would be completely different and it would probably get a pretty bad reception. Objectively speaking, the storyline of what we experience, is a person who gets out of bed, does the same again and again, is hysterical and goes to bed²⁰. The character is identified as *That Person*, compared to the person you would see in a crowd of people in the city on a busy day... An illustration of your stereotype image of a mainstream person, right? Mullican is hypnotised by a force you do not see (Mullican is put under behind stage by his hypnotist, who does not appear on stage during the performance). It almost becomes a piece of satire, if you analyse the storyline like you would structurally approach one in theatre. By using hypnosis he avoids the whole scientific approach we now have to theatre and brings it to a point where it is just about *humans empathically watching humans*. Hypnosis and the trance state is in itself not really interesting here; just the concept of it and the authenticity it potentially carries with it. If a person was

interested in hypnosis and trance they would probably get a way bigger experience from seeing a stage show. Mullican is not really doing anything spectacular, so you could wonder why he doesn't just act. As mentioned, I would say this is because of the conceptual dimension added in the words... In the myth surrounded Mullican's work. Together with his cosmology and the lectures of the past years I have come to see this spoken and written myth as a work of art in itself. Hypnosis is just a little part of the intellectual play which is the artist *Matt Mullican*. By saying this I do not mean intellectual as in book-heavy, but as someone who have truly dived into the mind and created something from this.

“Don’t you remember, Grandfather, a little while ago, when you spoke about the three-centered beings breeding on the various planets of that solar system where you existed for so long, you mentioned that on one planet—I forget what you called it—there exist three-centered beings who are on the whole like us, but whose skin is a little slimier than ours?”

“Aha!” laughed Beelzebub. “You must be asking about those beings who breed on the planet Earth and who call themselves men.”

from Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson by Gurdjieff

Transcending the Self: LP

I think we all recognise *That Person* from Mullican's work. Did *its* characteristics sound familiar to you? He works on a schedule, gets up in the morning and goes to bed in the evening. He needs routines and if something bothers him the film breaks and he becomes incapable of action and goes into a state of hysteria... *And* his is acting under hypnosis. We will gently jump to the work of Gurdjieff, as an introduction to the next artist making use of with hypnosis.

Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff was an author and what some would call an occultist, while others would label him a spiritual teacher, a guru or a "rascal saint"²¹. Gurdjieff's *doings* (because it might be wrong to call it *work*) dealt in ways with enlightenment, understood as reaching a higher level of consciousness: to break free from constraints of obsessive thinking, feelings of guilt, shame, morals principles, dogmatic thinking, etc. His *theory*²² presents human beings as slimy slugs in a state of *hypnotic waking sleep*; mindlessly following an influence from outside. This is the person who is not a master of him or herself. A slimy slug! In the work of danish artist, Lea Porsager's, Gurdjieff has been a returning source of inspiration. In 2013 she did a project directly referring to the slugs (FOOD FOR THE MOON — *Sluggish and Well-lubricated*). This was a year after I saw her work in

Kassel at the dOCUMENTA(13), *The Anatta Experiment*, a work I will return to later... First we will go back a few years.

I first heard about Lea Porsager through a program on danish television where a journalist investigated the danish art he did not quite understand. Some of the filming of the interview took place as Porsager was in a session with a hypnotist. This was in relation to a series of projects inspired by the Austrian thinker, Rudolph Steiner, who, besides being a scientist of this world, was also a scholar of spiritual matters. In short, the theory she dealt with at this point, states that all humans have a kind of a superior spirit double with great powers. This double strives for power and immortality, and to achieve this the double seeks a host, which it will consume to fulfil its ambition²³. The first works Porsager did in relation to this occult idea was *Double Miss* and *Recollection of a Needed Memory* (2006-2007). *Double Miss* is a film work where two monozygotic twins meet each other. In conversation with the artist, she told me that this film had a weird and kind of sexual tension to it. This initial project with hypnosis spawned the next work, as she became interested in what it would be like to meet ones own identical twin in a similar way. As a thought-experiment this was interesting, but in order to *feel* what it was like, she contacted a hypnotist and asked him to hypnotise her into her film. This lead to several encounters with her in-trance identical twin, another “Lea”, and she started to take the idea

of Steiner serious... She started to search for her *arhimanic double*. Porsager described her sessions in hypnosis as a kind of vivid dreaming, where she could recall everything after. Using her visions from the trance sessions she tried to pinpoint where her double was residing geographically and concluded that the double was in Svalbard (the very north of Norway). She went there and realised that there was a kind of a haunted village, *Pyramiden* [The Pyramid], a name which somehow fitted very well with the occult track she had to take.

Magnetic Correspondence (2008) was the next work and the culmination of this search for *The Double*. The work had two tracks of narration and 30 cries. The first consisted of records giving an insight in what had happened in the hypnotic search via texts, schemes and drawings. The second track was sort of commenting on, and reviewing, the first. These two tracks together presented “Lea” and *The Double* in dialogue with each other, but still it was not really autobiographical as the Leas were referred to as either “LEA” (capital letters), “lea” (lower case letters) or “LP”. As with Matt Mullican she proposed a disembodied relationship to these subjects, making them characters as in fiction. The 30 cries mentioned, were inspired by Aleister Crowley (as *The Cry of the 30 Aethyrs*) and these were hallucinations referring to a magical system used in certain occult practices.

The next step in Porsager's fascination with the occult, was to now follow Gurdjieff's example and summon seven friends to join her in the creation of *The New Rope* (the original *Rope* was a group of women Gurdjieff kept around him in Paris as participants/disciples in rituals). For the work, *LEAP - the Awakening of the Dark Muses* (2008), she wanted to see what it would be like for others to become her previously defined persona, "LP". The seven friends were hypnotised and from these sessions were recorded the voices of the friends, all edited and put together to form a kind of speech of "LP". This became quite weird as the women spoke in different languages. In the end one would not have the impression that it was really *one* person speaking, but a rather multi-tongued character (or monster). This matched Gurdjieff's idea about the self: That there is no *I*, but a series of changing *Is*. This approach to the self, or the dissolution of it, is a consistent impression I get from Porsager's body of work. Going to the project in Kassel again, this was also the focus in the *Anatta Experiment* (*Anatta* is used in buddhism and means *not-self* in Pali). In this work you know what has happened around the experiments, but you are not told *exactly* what or how. In all her works you are given a tip of the iceberg, some manipulated fragments of the process (edited voice recordings, cryptic schemes or drawings and the influences on the thought processes), which you then have to bridge and tie together

yourself till you get an image. This confabulation becomes the *personal experience* and this is what I value when I see works made in this way. In writing this segment I have also added my subjective view of her work and understanding of her references. To me this is the point of occult (*hidden*; more about this in the next chapter) systems of reality: To encourage fabulation and think out of the box — think beyond the mainstream conception of what is real: embrace the *unreality of reality*.

PART 3

TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

- INFORMATION SUFFOCATION

X

“The metaphysics of Tlön seek not truth, or even plausibility — they seek to amaze, astound. In their view metaphysics is a branch of the literature of fantasy.”

Jorge L. Borges examining the imaginary realm of Tlön

X

Towards Alternative Realities

As I stated earlier, we could say that Mullican makes use of the conceptual gravity which comes with hypnosis as term. He is creating a myth (or brand) around himself, enforcing it with his cosmology.

All is Matt Mullican. In that sense his work is also embracing a more traditional artist subject — an outward image rooting directly in a *self*. In his talks around his work it is personal: He mixes autobiographical anecdotes²⁴ with the process of his work indiscriminately with how the works evolved.

Porsager has used hypnosis for experimentation in her research for works. She never exhibited the actual hypnosis as Mullican directly does. “I have never been interested in this looking-weird while you’re hypnotised. I have been more interested in what kind of mechanisms you can use to get to other realities.”²⁵ Porsager is very present in her own work, but it is not *herself* in the same sense as Mullican. You could call this taking a professional distance, but I see it more as the embodiment of an attitude towards the topic she is dealing: dissolving the ego. Porsager makes use of “friends”, but the point of this is investigation. You never hear anecdotes about her personal relationship with them, as when Mullican talks about his work. This personal secrecy of Porsager is enforced by her massive amount of reference to

influences — she, as a person, almost hides in this, which to me is an essence of the occult, which after all means *hidden*.

Following the line of thought from above, I would call Mullican's approach outwarded and fast where Porsager's is more inwarded and slow. Mullican makes use of the spectacle; the direct empathic response you get the showmanship and the immediate, intuitively felt experience. Lea has the more subtle, slow-thinking-requiring methodology, which grows on you, but might be harder to get interested in at a glance.

Information Suffocation

Occultism, esotericism and transcendence of consensus-realities seems to be components in not only these two artists' work, but in a lot of works today. For clarification it might be worth mentioning that I understand *esotericism* primarily as *rejected knowledge* (especially since the enlightenment), *phenomena dealing with enchantment* (the (post)modern, ignoring historical currents and creating hybrid) or *inner tradition* (hidden truths for the initiated, e.g. shamanism)²⁶. *Occultism* is understood in its etymological definition meaning *hidden, concealed* or *secret* (from latin *occultus*). The occult is popularly connected to some esoteric practices, but concealed in a cult, a system or an order

which only the initiated or privileged might access. In art occultism as style and practice has become more popular in the last decade. In conversation with Porsager, Marco Pasi mentions this trend²⁷ and danish researcher of culture, Torben Sangild also pointed it out last year²⁸. This is within the artistic sphere, but zooming out a bit, we see that esotericism's siblings — *magic*, *fantasy* and *science fiction* — has been prominent in the most popular (and best selling) entertainment culture since 2000²⁹. Keep in mind that I haven't yet mentioned another new buzzword of our time: "mindfulness". Why are we interested in these alternate realities today?

In an article from 2007 Lars Bang Larsen describes society today as the fulfilment of Guy Debord's prediction from 1988 (*Society of Spectacle*) that "we now hover in a kind of limbo where no real development or change can take place because society represses the past and fears the future; no wonder there is a big market for the unseen"³⁰. In the article he goes on discussing what a trend of occult art might indicate: "Like other art forms that might be considered excessive (...) [e.g. psychedelic art] this new occult art urges us to raise the stakes and find out how we can create new transmissions of affect." Affect is here referring to Foucault's bio-politics (or biopower) and 'new' is suggesting a getaway from affect through/from a capitalist system³¹ — a system which is enforced by technological connectivity where capital

is exchanged digitally. Present in other of Larsen's texts³² is an anti-capitalist interpretation of things, which I always appreciate, but when focus is on hypnosis, I don't think capitalism is the primary target. I think it is *a* target indeed, but probably not the primary reason for using hypnosis. What else could it be?

Adorno saw a trend towards occultism happening in the 70s and wrote his *Thesis Against the Occult*³³. As a true German critic, the text begins with a hardcore statement: "The tendency to occultism is a symptom of regression in consciousness. This has lost the power to think the unconditional and to endure the conditional. Instead of defining both, in their unity and difference, by conceptual labour, it mixes them indiscriminately." This quote is from the seventies, but more recently the *indiscriminate mixing* was enthusiastically picked up by Frieze Editor, Jörg Heiser, as a possible form in itself, getting the label "Super-Hybridity"³⁴. In a soon to follow panel discussion on the topic, occultism and esotericism was also discussed, but the term was more or less dismissed at the end. To create super-hybrids was branded as superficial and the prize for the biggest super-hybrid achievement of the 20th century went to Nazis for their conglomerate of decontextualised iconography and fragmented historical arguments applied in their propaganda³⁵. Who would want to be an artist making hybrids after that comparison?³⁶ Almost in line with this, Marco

Pasi points out that there is a history of political resistance towards esotericism and occultism based on its relation to fascism: “If you get too much into this stuff [esotericism, occultism and related phenomena], then you lose contact with social or political problems. Because you live in a world of myth, you become insensitive to important issues such as exploitation, oppression, alienation.”³⁷ Picking up on the notion that there might be a mass-trend about transcending the political reality we live in and engaging in alternative one (be it through cinema, gaming, literature, sports, fitness, mindfulness or art); could this then mean that we have become insensitive towards more important issues? Maybe even that something like fascism could slowly be building up again? I see some nationalist currents in Denmark these days³⁸ and judging from the European Parliament election last year³⁹ mixed with the growing anti-islamic image evermore present in today’s media, I don’t think that the Danes are the only ones experiencing this move... Is that what a cultural move towards alternate realities through art means? An ignorant escape from some of the political issues at hands? No, I think it might be to extreme to make these connections.

PART 4

AS YOU FEEL YOUR
BODY GETTING
HEAVIER YOU BECOME
MORE AND MORE
RELAXED...

X

“Through our mutual general interest in wondering just what was going on out there in that gigantic world, and our many common specific interests in Humanism, anti-religionism, an enjoyment for Omar Khayyam, a curiosity for the bizarre like black magic and hypnotism, plus our common warped sense of humor, we formed a close friendship”

Adam Gorightly, founding member of the Discordian Church, quoting “Greg” in *The Prankster and the Conspirator* (2003).

X

As You Feel Your Body Getting Heavier, You Become More and More Relaxed...

We live in a time now, where it has become impossible to keep up with the amount of information circulating around us. You could say that it is common belief that our (European and American) attention span has diminished greatly over the past years⁴⁰. Also, the (not so) new media offers an information-source of almost secure confirmation in whatever you want to believe, making it even harder to find out what is *actually* going on⁴¹. All in all, I think most can relate to the fact that a rapid stream of different information makes it very easy to become distracted and want to jump to the next thing which catches our attention. No wonder Wim Veen of Delft University of Technology has branded the new generation “Homo Zappiens”. I think this aspect of our time could probably hint to why hypnosis suddenly got popular.

The story goes that before the term hypnosis was coined in 1843 by James Braid, he tried to popularise the phenomenon under the name of “monoideism” underlining the singular and unique focus or attention that could be achieved in trance. It sounds attractive to have only one idea in your head, right? Just for a while... Marcos Lutyens, who is also an artist working with hypnosis has a video on youtube in

which he sits down on what seems to be a high tech city square, where he almost illustrates the point of a need for a quiet moment of logging off⁴². As we saw with Lea this particular video also suggests an escape, here to the inside realm of meditation. An escape from a reality where our minds/brains are automatically forced to exercise an exhausting search for meaning by tying things together in a coherent story (which made Daniel Bor call our brain *ravenous*)... The accessibility of desired information is so great that it requires a lot of discipline to not stray off topic: one click takes the other and suddenly you are rambling about how fascists are about to take over the world. I think hypnosis, besides what has already been mentioned, brings a message about focus and slow contemplation. The use of hypnosis in contemporary art seems to me to be an encouragement for us in contemporary society to stop and think about where our minds are situated and maybe check if it is in the same place as our body. In other words re-establish the mind-body connection. The brain works a lot faster than our other organs.

In relation to art production and display, I also think we can discuss what hypnosis could mean. As time evolved, also the use of hypnosis evolved. Pascal Rousseau asks in a booklet for dOCUMENTA(13) if “hypnosis can become not just an *art de vivre* but a full-fledged artistic medium”⁴³, or, rephrased: if using hypnosis-induced trance to create an aesthetic experience could become an

alternative to object-based, materialistic artworks... This question is primarily raised in relation to the evolution of methods used in hypnosis. Combined with the fact that more artists today do not undergo hypnosis themselves, but hypnotise their audience. This is also something Lutyens has worked with and to mention a few others artists, Joris Lacoste and Raimundas Malašauskas as well. Here the work becomes what potentially appears to the individual in the trance state, and there is literally no physical object to sense. The short answer to Rousseau's question would seem to be "yes", but after this thorough investigation of what hypnosis and trance means, and how broad the term is, I would state that every art experience ideally has an element of light or heavy trance to it. The trance any art work *should* induce is that you come in rapport (establish a strong bond) with what you are contemplating. That there suddenly was a movement of artists using hypnosis around the late 00's suggests to me that a group of people found that this meditative element of contemplating an art work was possibly about to drown in a high paced culture, which had found its way to museums and galleries as well. Maybe rapport was disappearing from the art experience. Things were becoming too rushed. The direct way of dealing with this was to guide the audience into relaxation. Give them the ability to focus on a singular thing for a longer time. To hypnotise them.

NOTES

- 1 Wikipedia. "Phenomenology (philosophy)" Accessed April 1, 2015. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomenology_\(philosophy\)#Historical_overview_of_the_use_of_the_term](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomenology_(philosophy)#Historical_overview_of_the_use_of_the_term)
- 2 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Phenomenology" Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/#4>
- 3 Note: *There is a lot of debate on this. Neuroscientist, Daniel Bor, writes in the first chapter of his book, The Ravenous Brain (2012), that he assumes "consciousness" and "awareness" to be the same. This is a view which is shared amongst many scientists in the (neuro-)physiological sphere. Using this logic the brain is equal to awareness and the brain is therefore consciousness.*
- 4 Chalmers, David. "Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness" Journal of Consciousness Studies, 1995

Note: The 'hard' and 'easy' problems, still used in the consciousness debate today, was introduced by David Chalmers in 1995 The 'easy problems' are functions like the ability to discriminate, categorize, and react to environmental stimuli; the integration of information by a cognitive system; the reportability of mental states [more or less]; the ability of a system to access its own internal states; the focus of attention and the deliberate control of behaviour. The 'hard problems' are essentially the why question of consciousness and how it comes together as a whole, since all the mechanisms in themselves shouldn't give rise to abstract thought that could e.g. make a person wonder about reality.
- 5 James, Tad. "Hypnosis, A Comprehensive Guide" Crown House Publishing Ltd, 2000, p 51
- 6 Why is it *provocative*? See, Goldie, Peter. "Conceptual Art, Social Psychology and Deception" Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 1, No. 2, August 2004, p 40

Note: Lab based psychology went away from this term decades ago, because it implies that the participant of the experiment is being 'used'. In this essay Goldie discusses the similarities of social science and art and in particular participation and utilisation of the visitors of an exhibition.
- 7 Brown, Derren. "Tricks of the mind" Channel 4 Books; New Ed edition, 2007. Audiobook version, Chapter: Hypnosis 21'45"
- 8 James, Tad. "Hypnosis, A Comprehensive Guide" Crown House Publishing Ltd, 2000, p 19
- 9 Note: *I use the word subject here, because it seems that if you're in rapport with something it gets the status of subject, even if it's an object.*
- 10 *ibid*, p 20
- 11 *ibid*, p 52

- 12 Note: *As a comment on this though, Mikkel Karlsen, currently the only danish hypnotist doing public stage shows in Denmark (<http://MikkelKarlsen.dk>), made me aware that it is very likely possible, but that it would never be possible to get such an experiment past an ethical committee for scientific testing. For example, he told me about subjects who had given away their credit card pin code (not to Karlsen, but to another hypnotist) as part of a screening for a television program. The subjects later said they would never had done so 'sober'.*
- 13 Kirsch et al. "Definitions of Hypnosis and Hypnotizability and Their Relation to Suggestion and Suggestibility: A Consensus Statement" *Contemporary Hypnosis and integrative therapy* 28(2): 107–115, 2011
- 14 Kihlstrom JF. "Hypnosis" *Annual Review of Psychology* 36, 1985: 385–418.
- 15 Simonini, Ross. "Matt Mullican" *The Believer*, Volume 10, no. 7, September 2012, p. 46
- 16 *ibid.*, p. 46
- 17 Example: Mullican Matt. "matt mullican / under hypnosis / performance" Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2011. Accessed April 1, 2015. <https://vimeo.com/26881399>
- 18 Mullican, Matt. "Icon Culture: Lingue Franca for a Global Culture, PODCAST: Think Modern: Artists Speak: Conversations on Contemporary Art" MoMA, 2008, 46'29"
- 19 See Zwaan, Rolf A. "Effect of Genre Expectations on Text Comprehension", *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 1994, Vol 20, No. 4, 920-933
 Note: *"Modus of comprehension" is inspired by "reader comprehension strategies" referring to how a reader's expectations to a given textual genre (manual, news, fiction) affects the perception, cognition and memory. Whether this can be applied to perceived fact or fiction of a performance is not certain, but I have kept the reference to at least keep this open. More investigation should be done on this.*
- 20 Note: *Here referring to a specific performance he describes in his talk at MoMA mentioned above (endnote 18).*
- 21 Watts, Alan. "Out of Your Mind: Essential Listening from the Alan Watts Audio Archives" Sounds True, Inc. Unabridged edition, 2004
 Note: *Alan Watts refers to Gurdjieff as a beat guru (and sometimes as a rascal saint) in the context of speaking about different guru strategies. The beat guru is the playful one, who intentionally turns your world upside down. The other kind of guru is the square guru who is the strict authoritarian, direct kind of guru (exemplified by the zen method of Japan).*
- 22 Gurdjieff, George Ivanovich. "Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson - An Objective Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man" Harcourt, 1950. <http://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Beelzebubs-Tales-to-His-Grandson-by-G-I-Gurdjieff.pdf> (see next page for second part of note)

Note: *What is referred to at this point is a science fiction novel he wrote. The alternate title “An Objective Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man” underlines that it is not just intended to be just a piece of fiction for the aesthetic pleasure of reading. In practice Gurdjieff worked in a way resembling the cynics of ancient Greece, where actions in relation to mainstream conventions is a part of practically embodying a philosophy — a way of realising ones own mental constraints (here by breaking them) in order to be liberated from them.*

- 23 See Steiner, Rudolf. “Secret Brotherhoods: And the Mystery of the Human Double” Rudolf Steiner Press, revised edition, 2004, p. 56-57
- 24 Note: *This is consistent throughout many of his interviews and talks... Anecdotes like meeting his wife, watching his children play video games, sitting with a friend drinking cola, being in art academy back in the 70s, teaching art students today are scattered around in the sources I have already mentioned about Mulligan*
- 25 Porsager, Lea. Interview by author. December 4, 2014, “Jeg har aldrig været interesseret i at man ligesom ser mærkelig ud, når man er hypnotiseret... Jeg har været interesseret i, hvad det er for nogle mekanismer man kan bruge for at komme hen i nogle andre virkeligheder.”
- 26 These three definitions are condensed versions inspired by Hanegraaff’s definitions, see Hanegraaff, Wouter J. “Western Esotericism - A Guide for the Perplexed” Bloomsbury Academic, 2013
- 27 Porsager, Lea. “Ablaze with the Fires of Matter”, Edited by Synnøve B. Brøgger. Officin Copenhagen, Denmark, 2013, p. 5 [a conversation between Lea Porsager, Marco Pasi (Associate Professor in History of Hermetic philosophy and related currents at the University of Amsterdam) — Marco Pasi:]
“This leads me to a general remark about a phenomenon that has been visibly emerging in the last few years in contemporary art, and in which I have been increasingly interested. I am referring to a certain curiosity about and fascination with esoteric, mystical, and occult themes, which is also so present in your work. Now, why is this phenomenon manifesting itself ? It is not easy to give an answer and I wonder if enough thinking has been devoted to it. I would say that the trend probably started around ten years ago, and it has been growing since.”
- 28 Sangild, Torben. “Det mystiske bjerg - okkultisme i samtidskunsten” KUNSTEN. NU, April 7, 2014. Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://www.kunsten.nu/artikler/artikel.php?torben+sangild+vidvinkel+okkultisme>
“There is a growing interest towards the occult in contemporary art. I am definitely not the first to spot this, but that does not make it less striking.” [Der er en interesse for det okkulte i samtidskunsten i disse år. Det er jeg bestemt ikke den første, der har fået øje på, men det gør det ikke mindre påfaldende.]
- 29 Note: *This statement is based on a hunch and to some degree research... It’s a bit off topic, but I thought I’d put this is just as food for thought. The core of the mentioned statement came from wondering about which cultural products, in my lifetime, had become popular and from conversations with people still seemed to be popular (so not only hyped). What came to mind was*

Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, the superheroes of Marvel (e.g. Spiderman and Iron Man) and DC (e.g. Batman), Twilight, Hunger Games and Game of Thrones... All books or films in the genre of fantasy or science fiction. A thorough investigation of this would be a research project in itself, but I can share a few immediate observations I have made through browsing various box office lists available online... On Amazon's Top 100 Bestseller list, Books of the Decade [the 00s] four Harry Potter Books and two Twilight books are in the top ten (<http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?ie=UTF8&docId=1000473871>).

On IMDB's Top 100 All-Time Box Office List (USA) you find less than ten films which are not fantasy or science fiction; in the top ten, only one is not fantasy or science fiction (Titanic) — on the same list (out of 100) you will find that the vast majority is produced after 2000 (<http://www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross> - Box Office Mojo more or less backs up list list, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/>). Wikipedia though has a highest grossing film adjusted for inflation list where only four (five if you include religious films) are fantasy or science fiction, but here only one film produced after 2000 is present — and of course this is a fantasy/science fiction film (Avatar) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_highest-grossing_films).

Gaming is another industry grossing on the levels of films these days and here you also find fantasy and science fiction games high on gross lists, but there are quite some realistic games (e.g. sports games and war games). Still video gaming is to some extent going into another reality and with that in mind the growing industry itself witnesses a trend towards preoccupation with alternate realities.

Music could also be included as a subject for investigation — especially in the visuals of certain contemporary musicians, which was pointed out in a Swedish KOBRA documentary produced a few years ago...

- 30 Larsen, Lars Bang. "The Other Side" Frieze Magazine, Issue 106, April, 2007. Accessed April 1, 2015. http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_other_side/
- 31 *ibid.* reg. bio-politics, Lars Bang Larsen defines it as "how capitalism administrates society by using life itself as its resource"
- 32 Larsen, Lars Bang. "Zombies of Immaterial Labor: The Modern Monster and the Death of Death" E-flux journal #15, april 2010. Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/zombies-of-immaterial-labor-the-modern-monster-and-the-death-of-death/>
- 33 Adorno, Theodor. "Thesis Against Occultism, Minima Moralia" London: Verso, 1978, section 151, pp. 238
- 34 Heiser, Jörg. "Super-Hybridity: Pick and Mix" Frieze Magazine, Issue 133, September, 2010. Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/pick-mix/>
" (...) 'super' not because it's superior, but as a reflection of how hybridization has moved beyond the point where it's about a fixed set of cultural genealogies and instead has turned into a kind of computational aggregate of multiple influences and sources."
- 35 Heiser, Jörg, Jones, Ronald, Power, Nina, Price, Seth, Sandhu, Sukhdev, Steyerl, Hito. "Analyze This!"

Frieze Magazine, Issue 133, September, 2010. Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/analyze-this/>

[Nina Power referring to a point Heiser has made (though not in this discussion)] “of all 20th-century politics movements, which one was more ‘super-hybrid’ than National Socialism? A mishmash of ancient symbols (the swastika), occultism, warped Romanticism (the heroic death), modernization, capitalism, secularism and messianism, Nazism is as super-hybrid as you like.”

- 36 Note: *In my opinion this term should be examined further in a cultural sense and not be dismissed like that. It is still becoming more prominent and has especially found its place in popular entertainment. Pendleton Ward’s animated show “Adventure Time” (and “Bravest Warrior”) is to me one of the recent western trends making fantastic use of super-hybridity. If you examine Japanese popular culture of the decades you will find an incredible amount of outcomes (anime, manga, game shows, theatre) working in the form of super hybrids... If one should rationalise on this observation, from the point raised in the three Frieze articles about Super-Hybridity (the third one is: <http://blog.frieze.com/is-there-beauty-in-super-hybridity/>, accessed 10/3 2014) about super-hybridity being connected to escalating use of information technology, Japan might then be the future scenario of where we are heading regarding popular culture (primetime bondage game shows, here we come!).*
- 37 Porsager, Lea. “Ablaze with the Fires of Matter”, Edited by Synnøve B. Brøgger. Officin Copenhagen, Denmark, 2013, p. 10
- 38 Note: *In Scandinavia, a subculture with a very romantic image of the viking (the white warrior from the cold north) has increased in popularity and is also present in recent TV successes like Game of Thrones (HBO) or Vikings (History). Besides it is supported by the nordic food identity, primarily enhanced by NOMA [short for “Nordisk Mad” meaning Nordic Food], the Michelin-star magnet, which has been rated the best restaurant in the world since 2010. In a report from 2014, Denmark’s Statistic institute could conclude that in 2013 the National Museum in Copenhagen surprisingly made number one on the list beating the major art institutions Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and AROS with an increase in visitors of an unprecedented 50 % compared to 2012. This was due to the popularity of their temporary exhibition VIKING (accessed 25/1 2015, <http://www.dst.dk/pukoral/epub/Nyt/2014/NR190.pdf>). In danish politics, the nationalist party (the Danish People’s Party [Dansk Folkeparti]) has had its members increased 40 % in only two years and in the end of 2014 (accessed 26/12 2014 <http://politiken.dk/indland/politik/ECE2401832/dansk-folkeparti-saetter-medlemsrekord/>). When I was in Denmark during the holidays around new years, I could go through a whole extra section in of one of the major newspapers showing how hip people were going back to a more “authentic” way of living, which meant doing things the way their grandparents did — quite far from my understanding of authentic, which is something that is in itself (from authentics “one acting on one’s own authority”)... An “authenticity” which nonetheless seems to be a natural everyday adaption of another popular TV show called “Bonderøven” meaning The Redneck [directly translated Farmer-Ass], but with the negative connotations about an ignorant peasant exchanged for an idyllic, romantic image of the independent farmer who does everything in the old way. The program became so popular that it is now on the 14th season (going 7 years).*
- 39 See Huffington Post’s breakdown of the election: Elgot, Jessica. “European Elections: 9 Scariest Far-

Right Parties Now in The European Parliament” The Huffington Post UK, May 26, 2014. Accessed April 1, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/05/26/far-right-europe-election_n_5391873.html

- 40 Note: *Truth be told, you cannot scientifically generalise about attention span! It will always have to be investigated in a specific context.*

Still several popular sources such as news stations and blogs, confirm a diminishing attention span. A quick google search will connect you to these sites. Something which I have not been able to find research backing up is a returning statement that we have gone from a 12 minutes attention span ten years ago to only a few seconds today. I did a bit of digging and it seems that there are two sources recurring as backup for this assumption. I will let you judge the credibility of these statistics...

First source for this belief might be an infographic with a mistake of minutes/seconds with regards of today's attention span. See the infographic here <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/attention-spans-have-dropped-from-12-minutes-to-5-seconds-how-social-media-is-ruining-our-minds-infographic/87484?red=st>

Second source circulating online is the Statistic Brain Research Institute, quoted often for sharing the sensational finding that our attention span is now less than a gold fish. But how do you pinpoint the attention span of a gold fish which is known for having a short memory (not attention). See <http://www.statisticbrain.com/attention-span-statistics/> .

- 41 Several studies have been conducted on this. See for instance White (2013), *Beliefs and Biases in Web Search*, Microsoft Research

Note: The study found that people are more likely to settle for a positive answer (study asked two yes/no questions on specific health issues) and that people are likely to go for confirming what they were leaning towards already. Furthermore it showed that the ranking-bias of the search engine in combination with people's own biases resulted in the participants settling for the wrong answer almost half of the time.

- 42 Niedling, Erik. “The Future of Art: Marcos Lutyens, Part 16/21 (Hypnosis)” Accessed April 1, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-L5RDm8oDs>

- 43 Rousseau, Pascal. “Under the Influence: Hypnosis as a New Medium / Unter Einfluss. Hypnose als neues Kunstmedium, 100 Notes / 100 Thoughts “No.080: Pascal Rousseau.” dOCUMENTA(13) Notebooks, Hatje Cantz, 2012, p. 14

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