

5 May 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR

SUBJECT: Hypnotism and Covert Operations

1. I apologize for submitting a document as long as this one. The subject is highly controversial and even this treatment, which may appear long, is abbreviated.

2. Frankly, I now distrust much of what is written by academic experts on hypnotism. Partly this is because many of them appear to have generalized from a very few cases; partly because much of their cautious pessimism is contradicted by Agency experimenters; but more particularly because I personally have witnessed behavior responses which respected experts have said are impossible to obtain. In no other field have I been so conscious of the mental claustrophobia of book and lecture hall knowledge. I don't think we have enough evidence to say positively that hypnotism is a practicable covert weapon, but I do say that we'll never know whether it is or not unless we experiment in the field where we can learn what is practicable (materially and psychologically) in a way that no laboratory worker could possibly prove.

3. Even the terminology of hypnotism is in confusion. I have used terms like "suggestibility", "catalepsy" and "fascination" because they seemed to me descriptive, but these are argued to be inaccurate in current journals. As an example of the confusion, Mr. Morse Allen and I spent the better part of two days arguing with an academic practitioner of formidable reputation before we discovered that his vehement and perplexing disagreement with what we knew to be facts was based on semantic hair-splitting and congealed pig-headedness.

4. If you decide that the DD/P should pursue this subject further, I suggest that you meet with Morse Allen and myself to discuss the first recommendation of the attached paper.

Attachment

Distribution:

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HYPNOTISM AND COVERT OPERATIONS

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The consultant referred to above, who has participated in Agency operations as a member of an Artichoke team, feels that narco-hypnosis as he knows it is not as effective as it might appear at first glance to be. He feels that the stupor which ensues does not in every case permit as deep a stage of hypnosis, is very difficult to control and, further, certain post-hypnotic phenomena, of great value in clandestine work, may be lacking. (3) On the other hand, he agrees that drug-assisted hypnosis is essential in CIA work.

3. Awakening

There is no recorded instance in which a hypnotized subject has failed to awaken. Not one subject in a hundred will "sleep" beyond the hypnotist's suggestion, "In a moment I am going to awaken you. You will feel fine, happy and cheerful. There will be no ill effects--no headache, drowsiness, stiffness or other discomfort. I am going to count to three, and at the count of three I will snap my fingers and you will be completely awake. One--you are sleeping much more lightly. Two--almost awake now. Three--(snap!)--you are wide awake!"

If for any reason a subject does not desire to awaken (usually connected with a wish to continue the pleasure and comfort of release from anxiety and worry which accompanies hypnosis, apparently), there are several other techniques to be tried.

3. [redacted] and some other psychiatrists do not agree, at least insofar as the therapeutic use of narco-hypnosis is concerned. D

[redacted]

But suppose that while under hypnosis ^{a subject} subject is told that a loved one's life is in danger from a maniac and that the only means of rescue is to shoot a person designated as the maniac? Three expert practitioners (two from universities and the Agency consultant quoted above) say that there is no doubt on the basis of their experience that in such circumstances murder would be attempted. The only requirement is that the proposal be put "in a form and manner acceptable to the subject." Most modern authorities feel that a subject will carry out any suggestion which he can rationalize within the framework of his moral code.

(Currently, there is a murder trial in [redacted] in which the murderer has been judged to have been under hypnosis at the time of the crime. He has been retried, released and the hypnotist tried and convicted. The case is now under appeal. The comment of the three knowledgeable informants was that the hypnotist must have been a rank amateur to have been found out since any experienced operator would have known how to suggest away the fact that he had arranged the crime.) H

II. APPLICATION OF HYPNOSIS TO COVERT OPERATIONS

Obviously, disguised pre-testing and induction are necessities for the use of hypnosis in clandestine operations. Without at least the second of these I am unable to see that any covert hypnotic technique

[redacted]

requires operational experimentation. The possibilities are not only interesting, they are frightening. A kind of double-think Orwellian world of hypnosis, while unlikely, is not utterly fantastic. One thing is clear: we really do not know within what limits "belief" may be changed by hypnosis.

Based on what I have read, I judge that the [REDACTED] H [REDACTED] use an elaborate conditioned-reflex procedure in their "brain-washing". Even so, hypnosis may be able on the one hand to pre-condition a subject against the pressures, or after the fact to help undo the damage.

Analogous Case #1

One of the foremost U.S. laboratory experimenters with hypnosis on one occasion (1939) "converted" a campus atheist to a devout believer. The same operator was on the point of trying a similar experiment in reverse with a divinity student when the university authorities forbade further tests. Before the "conversion" to religion through hypnosis had been erased by negative suggestions, the subject had for over two weeks given every sign of being a dedicated religious convert. He was restored to his former disbelief. I know of no way of estimating how long the hypnotically-imposed orientation would have endured; but once implanted, of course, circumstances tended to reinforce it. Given a subject who could be converted at all, the new orientation might become permanent, the experimenter felt.

2. As part of their indoctrination procedure, CIA staff personnel might be tested for hypnotic susceptibility. Actually, it appears to be easier to hypnotize large numbers of people than a single subject, for the best subjects go "under" quickly

[REDACTED]

the statements in this paper are justified: [DCI, D/DCI, [REDACTED]

G DD/P, [REDACTED]

2. Authorize development in detail of the field-oriented operational program sketched above.

G 3. Select one DD/P Division as an initial test area and designate a single individual in the operational chain-of-command as director of the program.

4. Set as a re-appraisal date either one year from the time the first team arrives in the test area or sooner if the director of the program feels that the test program has failed or is failing.