

“Reality is Plastic: The art of impromptu hypnosis” by Anthony Jacquin (2008)

1. INTRODUCTION

The book I will review is all about impromptu hypnosis, mostly for entertainment, but it contains many ideas for brief hypnotherapy work as well. I was drawn to this book because stage hypnosis and impromptu hypnosis has always fascinated me, but there has been something inside of me that has avoided going to a stage performance or even using some of the rapid induction techniques taught in the SAIH training. I think I have a fear of being made to do something that will embarrass me during a stage performance, and I have an even greater fear of trying a rapid induction during a hypnotherapy session and it doesn't work. I guess the sense of shame is a strong emotion in me. I was looking for a book that would teach me a few more impromptu hypnosis techniques so that I can feel more confident in trying them. It has also been a while since I was able to see a hypnotherapy client in a proper session, so I looked for this book which might teach me some tools I can use in non-therapy situations.

In the opening chapter the author talks about this problem I am experiencing “far too many people...especially hypnotherapists...do not feel confident to give an impromptu demonstration of hypnosis and will make an excuse. This has much to do with a little bit of fear – principally the fear of failing and looking foolish” (Jacquin, 2008) page 2. I believe I have a slight knowledge gap in this area as well and the author identifies this problem as well. Finally, I also want to enjoy hypnosis again. I found myself getting too “serious” when doing therapy with clients and lost my love for it along the way. I am in a place of my life now where I want to reignite that sense of fun and I hope this book will help me along that journey.

The main idea of the book is that “personal perception of reality is just a malleable point of view. Hypnosis changes our perception of reality and in this sense, reality is plastic (Jacquin, 2008). The author believes that hypnosis is hypnosis whether it takes place in a therapy room, a party or a sports field. His goal is to provide techniques and scripts to hypnotists so that they can feel more confident in using them to help people overcome their limiting beliefs and “change their reality”. My goal for reading this book was to be able to learn a few more tools to be able to put them into my therapy toolbox so that I have them available if I ever need them, or even if a client asks for them, so that I can be as client-centered as possible.

2. BOOK FORMAT

After a brief history of hypnosis, the author explores our own personal perceptions of hypnosis, challenging me as a hypnotherapist to broaden my view of what hypnosis is and how it can be used. He then spends time discussing how one should view yourself as THE HYPNOTIST (not A hypnotist) and the role of absolute confidence in what you are saying and the ability of your clients to go into hypnosis. He discusses a pre-talk process (setting things up, pg 17); signs of hypnosis (pg. 20); hypnotic phenomena (pg. 23); convincers which are mostly physical (“the set piece”, pg. 27); inductions (pg. 39); deepeners (pg. 63); suggestion

sets (“direction”, pg. 68); application of impromptu hypnosis (pg. 74); trance termination (“back in the room”, pg. 93); safety issues, abreactions, morals and ethics (pg. 95).

3. LEARNINGS FROM THE BOOK

3.1 Hypnotic process and misconceptions

I found that there was definite overlap in the steps involved in the way SAIH taught it and the processes outlined by the author in this book. In this way it was a confirmation of what I have learnt so far and it was good to see someone who follows a very different approach to hypnosis (i.e. impromptu entertainment based) basically doing it the same way I would have, just in a much shorter space of time – “in impromptu hypnosis setting things up needs to be accomplished more swiftly – often in a few sentences, often in a few seconds” (Jacquin, 2008).

This is interesting to me, because I have always been someone who processes information slower and systematically. This is still my modus operandi till this day. I find I have the need to collect a lot of information before I decide on anything. I wonder if there is a deeper reason for this, or if it’s just a function of my personality. It could be something interesting to explore during a hypnosis session. I think one of my fears with doing more directive, impromptu hypnosis is that I am “forcing” people to do something they don’t want to do. This might be an issue that many therapists deal with and in this sense, this book could be a helpful tool. Anthony states on pg. 19 “get rid of any of your own fears about whether they will go into hypnosis or not or whether you will look like a fool if they do not. Eliminate your own misconceptions about what kind of subject they might or might not be” (pg. 19). This book then can teach me and other therapists how to overcome their own misconceptions and become better client centered practitioners.

3.2 Hypnotic phenomena, convincers and inductions

The author discusses many signs of hypnosis and encourages people to use these phenomena and build on them, use them to enhance trance and link the phenomena to whatever it is you want to do next, thereby creating a positive spiral of belief in the client. The phenomena discussed include catalepsy, ideomotor movements, amnesia, hallucinations, dissociation, hypermnesia, regression, revivification, analgesia, anesthesia, and time distortion.

The author notes that these phenomena, convincers, and inductions are often presented as “tests” and that is why some hypnotists don’t use the techniques. “One reason given is that if the subject fails to do what is asked of them it is more difficult to hypnotize them – this is true to some extent, especially if the set piece is presented as a test” (Jacquin, 2008). Another reason given for the fact that they are overlooked or used in a limited way is that “many of the techniques have some physiological/mechanical reason why they work – the odds are stacked that the subject will succeed – so some hypnotists believe they are being dishonest in using them or just miss their value and dismiss them as tricks” (pg. 28). I have to say I can directly relate to this. I still remember being rather freaked out when I first did

the “self-mastery” course and experienced some of the rapid inductions and especially the swinging crystal. At that stage I was still heavily influenced by religion and immediately resisted what had happened and judged it as being wrong. I think perhaps to this day, that negative belief still resides in me, and reading this book is one thing I am trying to do to reframe that experience.

The inductions the author discusses are all very rapid, overt, verbal, and physical. He notes that as a hypnotist, one should be flexible, but it is better to be “extremely accomplished at one or two inductions – instead of trying to learn all the thousands of inductions available” (pg. 39). I guess this also confirms SAIH’s approach to teaching their students the Mastermind induction, so that we are extremely confident and proficient in one, well-thought-out induction. As I mentioned, I have stayed away from these rapid, overt, and physical inductions. The author believes that “this rapid approach is the most effective for impromptu applications of hypnosis. It could be argued that it is the most effective for hypnosis full stop – wherever or for whatever purpose it is used” (pg. 40). I still struggle reading a sentence like this.

I tried doing the glove anesthesia we were taught on a friend of mine, it didn’t work. I wasn’t feeling at all confident while doing it, and I haven’t tried doing it since then. While reading many of the inductions used in this book, I still feel as if there is just so much physical touching of the client that takes place. I also found that there was definitely scope for some of these techniques he mentions to be abused i.e. he explains how to get someone to give you something for free.

One approach I can however see myself using is the Rossi style brief therapy. I like its simplicity and flexibility. It is client centered and allows the client to determine the own pace of their experience instead of leading them.

3.3 Morals and ethics

A final interesting point from the book is in the last chapter. “It is often stated by hypnotists that you cannot make people do things they would not normally do and certainly cannot make people do things that go against their morals and ethics. I absolutely disagree. Please keep in mind that morals and ethics are just a surface veneer maintained for social acceptance. When the conscious critical mind is out of the equation it is possible and likely that moral and ethical boundaries are too” (pg. 97). I guess a statement like this is one of the reasons I don’t want to use these types of techniques, I know that I have this kind of power. Ironically however I have realized while reading this book, the very fact that I am aware of this and avoid it, actually means that I won’t abuse it.

4. FINAL THOUGHTS

I found this book beneficial. It served its purpose i.e. opened my mind to my own misconceptions, re-confirmed what I already knew and was taught and provided me with one or two new tools I can add to my toolbox to make me a more client centered therapist. I think hypnotherapists who have become used to their way of doing therapy, sometimes

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even believing it is the only way, could benefit from having their perceptions tested and stretched a bit.

OVERALL BOOK RATING: 6.5 out of 10