

## Patrick Wall and Ronald Melzack describe the origins of the Gate Control Theory (excerpt 2)

*Oral History Interview with Ronald Melzack*, 16 October 1993 (Ms. Coll. no. 127.3), John C. Liebeskind History of Pain Collection, History & Special Collections Division, Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, University of California, Los Angeles

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RONALD MELZACK: In the course of our talking I said to Pat, “You know, you and I think a lot alike about a lot of things. Why don’t we write a paper together?” So we wrote a paper that was published in *Brain* in 1962. And we struggled with that paper, putting it all together, presenting a pattern theory format to practically everything, because we were certainly both dead against the Cartesian S-R straight through one-to-one psychophysical bullshit.

JOHN LIEBESKIND: That was Wall and Melzack?

MELZACK: That was Melzack and Wall. It was sort of my idea and we initiated it and it was certainly jointly done all the way through and Pat’s contribution was tremendous. And I think it was I who had the idea, in fact, of putting it all out -- the time when it became feasible -- we were writing and writing and writing and writing and writing; when it became feasible was when it dawned on me that if we set it out as a series of propositions or statements, and then provided data to support the statements, like you need more than one impulse, you need patterning, and that sort of thing. So the paper really came along fine and was sent to *Brain* and the editor of *Brain* was Lord Brain [Sir Walter Russell Brain, 1895-1966], who signed his letters “Brain” -- and he was very pleased with it and he accepted it and it was published. I got a couple letters from Don Hebb -- a letter from Don Hebb saying “Atta boy” -- and I think three people read the paper and that was the end of it.

In the meantime -- so I still -- now I got involved in pain. Really in every way -- not just merely intellectually, but Mrs. Hull and her pain -- now the passion is there. Now I suddenly realized that by an incredible fluke, I had stumbled into an area that I could make an intellectual life out of. That gave my life the meaning that I wanted in life and was useful and it was a contribution and I would do something good with my life, or I could do something good. That sense of guilt that goes along with depression was always with me. I didn’t know what I was guilty of, but I was always guilty. And suddenly even that could take some of that guilt away, assuage that guilt, if I were doing this good thing to help people somehow, or that would or could help people. So I was now really well into the field of pain -- gut and head involved. And at one point I suggested to Pat that we try another paper in which we take that first one, that was a good paper but never was read by anybody, and had no impact on anything whatever, and deal exclusively with the

problem of pain. So Pat thought that was a good idea. And at that point I was offered a job here at McGill.