

## **When the hammock swings**

### **A fantasy of systemic Neuro-Linguistic-Psychotherapy**

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*Without context, there is no communication.* Gregory Bateson (1972)

What is systemic Neuro-Linguistic-Psychotherapy (NLPt)? How do we do NLPt? What differentiates NLPt from Neuro-Linguistic-Programming (NLP)? What is so interesting about NLPt? What is so challenging in NLPt?

NLPt is a new school of psychotherapy; it is still in its infancy; it is still lacking a coherent theoretical understanding. Even within the field, many of us are still uncertain as to how to define what we do, and what makes it different from NLP and from other schools of psychotherapy.

In this paper I will try to begin and answer these questions. I shall take you on a journey that began with systemic intentions and lost its systemic quality. I will show how NLPt is an honest endeavour to go back to its systemic roots and I will claim that it is impossible to consciously be a systemic psychotherapist, but it is important to try.

However, to genuinely speak systemically – and even to fully understand what we mean when we talk about systems, we need either an epistemological vocabulary of cybernetics, or a metaphor. In fact, Bateson claimed that any output of mind is a metaphor (Eaton, 2001b), and Keeney wrote that therapy is a process of weaving stories between therapist and client (1983). So, a great lover of stories that I am, let us follow the latter route.

*Once, in a forgotten corner of Mexico, there was a powerful white sorcerer. His powers were great, greater than all of his contemporaries, perhaps. Yet his students counted sparsely, for he insisted to only take as an apprentice one who possessed a kind heart, an open spirit and benign curiosity.*

*And one day, he found an apprentice, or maybe she had found him? She indeed possessed the virtues of curiosity, of open spirit and of kind heart but she was very young. So the girl spent years, studying. She learned about medicinal plants and the techniques and rituals of sorcery; she learned to mend fractured arms and broken hearts; she learned to enter a trance and induce trance in others; to journey to the higher realms of spirit and the lower realms of soul; to use her dreaming body.*

*And then one day, on a hazy dusk of a not yet morning, the sorcerer woke up his apprentice. ‘Today,’ he said, ‘you are about to learn the most important lesson of sorcery.’ She listened, attentively. ‘To understand the lesson,’ the sorcerer continued, ‘you need to answer one question. And the question is: “what makes a hammock swing?”’*

*Now, the young sorceress didn’t know the answer to her teacher’s question, but having spent a good few years with him, she certainly knew*

*How to answer it. And so, a dedicated and disciplined student – she got herself into a hammock.*

And this is where it all started. In the early 1970's, influenced by Systemic thinking cybernetics and the linguistic revolution (Chomsky's transformational Grammar), two young people didn't know the answer, but were willing to try and find how to answer it. Richard Bandler and John Grinder endeavoured to create a deeper level of learning, by revealing patterns of genius of successful and efficient therapists. Using observation skills (Bateson was a great believer of non-verbal communication), and linguistic structures – they embarked upon a journey of finding what made hammocks swing.

It takes courage to step beyond theories and labels and, with curiosity, sensory-acuity and not knowing, to observe patterns of genius. Influenced by Gregory Bateson and transformational grammar, Bandler and Grinder modelled Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson<sup>1</sup>. How do they do what they do? They asked. They were looking for patterns, for relationships, for feedback – and in that they were truly systemic. They tried to understand how do others understand how to do things.

*There she was, swinging. Ever so gently to the right, ever so lightly to the left. Rocking, and a pleasant feeling spread over her body quite naturally. She noticed how her breath slowed down, to move in tandem with the gentle swings of the hammock. She noticed how her pulse was creating interesting patterns of coming and going – just like her thoughts, her sensations, her emotions. It was as if everything had a special sort of music, and she was watching an orchestra of movements. It was only after a few hours when she got up, having smelt the welcoming scents of breakfast, and entered the house. She joined the sorcerer and the two ate in silence, for this is the manner in which sorcerers eat.*

*'I think, my teacher,' the apprentice has finally said, 'that what makes a hammock swing is rhythm and movement; the rhythms of my heart and body, the rhythms of earth, the wind and the trees and the immanent rhythm of the hammock.'*

*The sorcerer looked at her lovingly and smiled, and so she knew she has yet to answer his question fully.*

In their journey, Bandler and Grinder were joined in by other excellent explorers (such as Leslie Cameron, Robert Dilts and Judith DeLozier) who were all curiously looking at the 'how's of information processes. As a result of this process, they found fantastically ecological patterns. The founders of NLP arranged these patterns into principles (presuppositions) that guided the 'how to know'<sup>2</sup>. The first principle was 'the map is not the territory', referring to the fact that we don't respond to the world itself but to the way we perceived it. This view<sup>3</sup>, which can be regarded as Kantian psychotherapy (Kant, 1781; Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2001a), is why NLPt comes under the

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<sup>1</sup> See Bandler & Grinder, 1975; Grinder & Bandler, 1976; Bandler & Grinder, 1979; Satir et al., 1976.

<sup>2</sup> See O'Connor & McDermott, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Originating in Korzybski's work, (Bateson, 1972).

Experiential Constructivist section in the UKCP. Two other important presuppositions (among many) postulated that people make the best possible choice in their construct, and that human behaviour is goal oriented.

However, while utilizing some general model-principles of the flow of information, such as TOTE<sup>4</sup> and cybernetics and creating some models such as the Meta model & Milton model (two different models for clarifying communication and hypnotic communication respectively<sup>5</sup>), the originators of NLP did something else. They have also patterned the models and principles into procedures. They have created the (much more financially promising) techniques of ‘what to do’ in communication, business and therapy.

In this very moment, NLP lost its systemic scope and became linear – it became an ‘is’ rather than a ‘becoming’; the procedures ‘it’ed the movement of information. Like any other approach to information (or therapy), the moment you have pinned it down it stopped being alive<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the patterns and techniques are very useful – and have influenced many areas of modern western life – therapy, communication, and business to name a few, but NLP lost its unfathomability and became ‘customised’ and scripted. The technicality of NLP, sometimes used with little regard to humanity, has also drawn some enemies to this new, curious approach to therapy and information. Bateson called it ‘a bag of tricks’ (Keeney, 1983).

Bateson even said he regretted introducing Bandler and Grinder to Erickson (Keeney, 1974 in Gawler-Wright, 2001). Bandler and Grinder observed their models from outside the system – they saw themselves as external to the system observed, and therefore missed what was a most vital element of Erickson’s work – his intention and context<sup>7</sup> (Keeney, 1983). NLP had to move on, in its task for modelling, for creating excellence in communication, for providing pragmatic guiding principles for good communication – it had to move on without being sucked into mere techniques.

*And so, for the second time, she took herself back into the hammock. There she was, swinging. Ever so gently to the right, ever so lightly to the left. Rocking, and the pleasant feeling spread over her body even more than before. She allowed the movements to continue and resonate inside her, gradually becoming aware of the subtle reality in her. She noticed her sadness travelling inside her solemnly. She noticed her anger splashing within her unexpectedly and her joy bubbling in her. She felt her fear creeping up from beneath her cold feet. She noticed how her emotions had very clear sensory distinctions. With awe, the sorceress realised how these experiences found their way to influence her environment and so she held her breath for a moment.*

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<sup>4</sup> ‘TOTE’ Stands for Test-Operate-Test-Exit, the basic feedback loop offered by Miller, Galanter, and Pribram (1960).

<sup>5</sup> The Meta-model is based on Satir’s language patterns, and the Milton model – on Erickson’s.

<sup>6</sup> A thorough discussion on the subject can be found in Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2001a, 2001b & 2001c

<sup>7</sup> Systemic work is about alternating between seeing yourself as a part of the system and shifting to punctuating yourself as different from it – thesis and antithesis complimenting each other – this is recursion.

*The sorceress opened her eyes, only to realise that the sun was in mid-sky, that it was lunchtime. As she stepped into the house, lunch was already waiting for her. Together they ate in silence, loyal to the ways of sorcerers.*

*'I think, my teacher,' the young apprentice said once they finished, 'I think that what makes the hammock swing is emotions and will: my own sadness, fear, joy and anger and the earth's feelings, the trees'. It is emotions that makes it swing.'*

*The sorcerer looked at her lovingly and smiled, and so she knew she has yet to answer his question fully.*

During the 1980's and 1990's Robert Dilts, Todd Epstein and Judith DeLozier (among others) have recognised the fact that NLP became stagnant and procedural. Naming the 'old' NLP ways 'Classic Code' (or Old Code) NLP, they have proposed New Code NLP, trying to reconnect with the epistemological question 'how do we know that we know?' (DeLozier, 1995). They have created beautifully crafted models such as SCORE model, NeuroLogical levels, reimplanting and somatic syntax (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000) – models which are far more respectful, less trickery and more holistic than 'Old Code' NLP. However, the patterns were still hierarchical, linear in their punctuation (they created static 'things'). The therapist was still always outside the system and the therapeutic relationship, as well as other contexts of feedback, found no expression in the practise<sup>8</sup>. These models were still reductionists inasmuch as they offered 'a map of the world' (a schemata). Woodsmall (1999) argues that 'The words systems and systemic have very definite meanings in cybernetics... which differ from how they are used by Dilts.' To be systemic, you need to both hold a map and move outside it, changing between contexts (= using recursive thinking), to work with both conscious techniques and unconscious contexts.

Indeed, the New-Code NLP is much more holistic and encompassing, as well as more respectful in its praxis than Classic Code NLP. New-Code NLPers have modelled systemic thinking more seriously than classic NLP – they have used models and patterns of Bateson, Erickson<sup>9</sup> and Castaneda's Don Juan as well as shamanic traditions – but they have still created and taught patterns as if they are 'prescribed things'. It is not enough to model cybernetic epistemology to have one. They have transcended, to some extent, the techniques of 'what to do' and presented techniques of 'how to do'. But still, techniques are applications of specific maps, and when used outside context they have little value. New Code NLP processes have mainly stayed in what Bateson would call Learning Level II (Bateson, 1972; Keeney, 1983, Woodsmall, 1999). It means learning how do we learn, comparing sets of contexts, but not yet exploring relationships between 'realities' - how we have learned before, what consists of the learning-system and other transactions of feedback. In this level of learning (III) we shake the foundations of ourselves insofar as we have maps, we learn the rules of our social / cultural constructs (schemas / constructs / rules for reality formation), and can challenge them.

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<sup>8</sup> The techniques were not presented or taught in context, as a part of a higher order of aesthetic base.

<sup>9</sup> Much of Milton Erickson's work was systemic-psychotherapy par-excellence. For examples of his work see Gilligan, 1987; Haley, 1986; Rosen, 1982; Rossi & Ryan, 1985; Rossi et al, 1992.

It doesn't mean, however, that the patterns and models of New-Code NLP are not effective or therapeutically attractive – quite the contrary. New-Code NLP offers innovative ways of working, but these are still mostly linear (or multi-linear)<sup>10</sup> and not yet systemic. Any attempt at art without mastering techniques leads to muddle. However, 'for the artist, the skills and techniques of therapy are secondary to a more encompassing perspective' (Keeney, 1983). Moreover, I believe that Dilts and DeLozier actually DO work systemically, but the techniques and tools they teach were somehow transferred and taught without a systemic context. When used outside the context, these patterns are still 'a bag of tricks'.

However, the vast potential of using systemic therapy through language, hypnotic patterns and relationships was still left relatively untouched.

*And so, for third time, she took herself back into the hammock. There she was, swinging. Ever so gently to the right, ever so lightly to the left. Rocking, and once again the pleasant feeling; even quicker, even more profoundly.*

*And as she was rocking and swinging, the sorceress became aware of the relational field between her body and her emotions and thoughts, between herself and the hammock, the rhythms and the time of the day. It was an enormous insight, one she could not comprehend in her conscious-mind alone, but held with the entirety of her being. Time had no meaning or duration and yet it passed, and when she opened her eyes it was dinnertime. The sorceress knew she had learnt a great lesson. Slowly, she got herself into the house and joined the sorcerer for dinner. Silently, they ate their meal.*

*'I think, my sorcerer,' the sorceress said, 'I think that what makes this hammock swing is relationships. Between me and myself, you and me, the hammock and me; relationships between rhythms and emotions, the world and my soul; between you and your teaching, what is and what is becoming. I think,' she said, 'that the hammock swings in relation to me swinging in it.'*

*The sorcerer nodded. 'You have been a good student,' he replied and smiled, so she knew she has yet to answer his question fully.*

### **NLPt – some principles of systemic understanding**

NLP, Classic-Code and New-Code still form the foundation for NLPt. NLPt is, after all, a therapeutic utilization of NLP. In NLPt, we try to retrieve the valuable processes and principles (the context) behind the procedures, and this is the systemic nature of NLPt. When used contextually, any set of rules (any principles behind a map) can be used systemically. To connect NLP with systemic NLPt, let us look back into what Bateson meant when he talked about systemic therapy.

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<sup>10</sup> That is, using a variety of linear processes. A systemic process includes the feedback and information between these processes too.

Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) was in many ways a man of the renaissance, thoroughly exploring many areas of thought and art – from anthropology and evolution, through psychiatry and psychotherapy, to cybernetics and system theory. He influenced many forms of psychotherapy including Family systemic therapy, NLP and brief therapy (Eaton, 2001b).

Bateson believed that human communication operates at many contrasting levels of abstractions. Many of these levels are unconscious, and frequently implicit. For example, when a colleague always greets me with ‘keeping busy?’ he conveys more than just good manners; values and prioritising are also communicated. ‘Language is a tool for imposing distinctions upon the world,’ writes Keeney (1983).

Our ability to discriminate between the levels of communication we receive and deliver influences, to a large extent, our way of ‘being in the world’ (our belief system, schemas and so on). Having moved to the UK from Israel, it took my quite a while to understand that when someone says ‘do come to visit us again’, he might actually mean, ‘I genuinely hope that I’ll never have to see you again’. This idea of different levels of communication, called logical types and logical typing, is central to Bateson’s communication theory – examining the way we arrange our reality in different classes of abstractions.

Bateson applied these principles in the field of understanding pathology and delivering therapy. Pathology, he claimed, is confusion (or logical mistake) in the order of logic, a misplacement of information within context; it is a systemic effort for self-correction, a metaphor for a whole ecology of a system (ibid). For example, he saw psychosis as a way of dealing with double-bind situations<sup>11</sup> (psychosis was therefore a solution to an imposed situation) (Bateson, 1972; Eaton, 2001b; Keeney, 1983).

In therapy, we talk about ‘what’ we think. More importantly, we communicate the rules of the way we think. An even higher order of communication<sup>12</sup> is when we talk about the rules and examine them. He regarded every behaviour and learning, every level of organisation as well as genetics and neurophysiology as communication processes, dialectically creating ‘laws’ and abiding them (ibid).

In Bateson’s theory of the mind, ‘mind’ was a relational field. At the time of writing this paper it would be wrong to attribute ‘mind’ to the sub-unit Asaf (or to the computer<sup>13</sup>), the mind is the total communication process of me, the computer and the pathways of communications (fingers, eyes, previously learned ideas, etc). When you are reading the paper now, ‘mind’ is the total communication process of you, the ideas and pathways and me. Thus – a person, idea or action does not exist independently of the process of information. Symptoms, as well as mastery belong to a more encompassing perspective than ‘client’ or ‘therapist’ (ibid).

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<sup>11</sup> An imposed situation where there are contradictions between different levels of communication, and no way to escape, a lose-lose situation.

<sup>12</sup> Higher order does not imply ‘more important’, but rather a higher level of abstraction / organisation.

<sup>13</sup> It is fascinating to compare Bateson’s systemic views with Searle’s argument against AI (1981).

Bateson writes: ‘The ‘beauty’ of the woods through which I walk is my recognition both of the individual trees and of the total ecology of the woods as *systems*’ (Bateson, 1972)<sup>14</sup>.

When applied in psychotherapy, the therapist ought to recognise his part in therapy, for there is no such thing as ‘client’ or ‘symptom’ independently of the context, and while in therapy – independently of the therapeutic situation. The role of the therapist is therefore to move between frames (i.e. recursion), and help the client shift frames too, viewing the symptoms within the context of a recursive feedback. The essence of this shift is ‘an involuntary change in deep unconscious epistemology – a spiritual experience’ (ibid).

DeLozier defines system as ‘the whole unit of mind’ (1995). And indeed, mind is an example of (or a metaphor for) a system, whereupon different components are joined in a matrix of feedback. Systemic therapy therefore observes movement, relationships and recursive exchange of information between frames (frame could be a person, a family, a culture, and so on), looking at patterns rather than ‘objects’ (Keeney, 1983).

NLPt is a specific application of NLP in the field of therapy. I assume that what differentiates NLPt from NLP is exactly its systemic nature, so NLPt is defined by being systemic (Schütz, 2002). The systemic Neuro-Linguistic-Psychotherapist believes that problems indicate an incorrect relationship with frames or attributing ‘reality’ to a perceived reality (Eaton, 1997; Keeney, 1983). Pathology is about eating the chocolate-shaped soap, after tasting it. It means that every problem was once a solution in a different context. The therapist will help to connect a symptom to a higher order of feedback process (mostly unconscious context), which will provide correction, through using analogical processes (= abductive thinking) (Keeney, 1983).

The explorative nature within the therapeutic encounter is also evident in NLPt as a therapeutic field exploring itself. As a school of therapy, NLPt draws knowledge and practices from many schools of therapy<sup>15</sup>. We strive to interact with different maps: including them, sharing them, observing them and comparing between them. We try to use principles and processes when they are useful without needing to make them ‘true’ if they work or ‘false’ if they don’t.

One day Don Juan said to Carlos Castaneda: ‘The world is incomprehensible. We won’t ever understand it; we won’t ever unravel its secrets. Thus we must treat it as it is, a sheer mystery!’ (Castaneda, 1971). But how tempting it is to think we know it! How much easier it is to pretend that reality is fixed, stable and known to us!

*The night was waiting, windless and still, for the sorceress to come back, for the fourth time, and get into the hammock, which was lulling her to sleep in a magical rhythm.*

*And she was swinging; slowly, slowly – swinging and rocking. She dreamt of impossibilities and hopes, and of colourful future memories. She was dreaming, I think, or is it your imagination? Since for a brief moment, that*

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<sup>14</sup> What he didn’t write, is that as soon as he walked in the wood he became a part of the system, and the beauty of the wood is partly the very taking part in that system.

<sup>15</sup> See Jelem & Schültz, 1997

*lasted forever, she was no longer separate from the hammock. Together, hammock and a woman, a single unit is swinging. There wasn't a storyteller and a reader, a story and a reality – there was movement; a moment when I write especially for you to read and be part of this.*

*On a hazy dusk of a not yet morning, the sorcerer woke his apprentice up. She looked at him, and saw him looking back at her: 'My sorcerer,' she said, 'I do not know what makes a hammock swing.'*

Conscious systemic NLPt is an ideal. I believe that we cannot be fully systemic consciously because we cannot not have a world-view at a given time (we cannot not have a linear map in a context). 'Conscious purpose,' writes Keeney, 'with its aim of achieving specific goals, cannot take into account whole ecological contexts' (1983). We can only learn to move quickly between maps and aspire to achieve a state of 'stopping the world'<sup>16</sup>, where all realities seem to be a possibility for the client and therapist.

We can perfect our techniques consciously, spend time and effort in improving our own conscious-unconscious recursion and patiently allow the system to interact and manifest. We cannot consciously be systemic for consciousness is only a part of a larger system, and only in the context can communication occur. It is possible to do systemic NLPt if we incorporate unconscious processes. Further more, systemic NLPt should not be attributed to the 'therapist' but instead to the therapist-client relationship (double-description).

NLPt is a tasking process for it is about both therapist and client tolerating paradoxes. It is tasking because it defies definitions, because it is ever evolving, because it requires the courage of both therapist and client to step into the unknown, into new realities – and have faith.

*'At last' the sorcerer sighed with relief.*

*'For centuries,' he said, 'generations of sorcerers tried to solve the question of what made hammocks swing. One famous school of sorcery indeed believed, as you have answered firstly, that what made a hammock swing was rhythm – body rhythms, earth rhythms, all rhythms. Another important lineage of sorcery claimed that emotions and will made hammocks swing, and my own lineage – the old tradition of white sorcery, held that it was relationship and dynamics between all existence that made the hammock swing, that there was no such thing as a hammock swinging without you swinging in it.'*

*'But really, my dear sorceress,' the sorcerer smiled, 'really it is the wrong question all together. The right questions should be: "Where are you when the hammock swings?" And you'd better make sure you are in it, swinging.'*

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<sup>16</sup> See Castaneda, 1972.

Stephan Gilligan, highly influenced by Milton Erickson and an influential voice in psychotherapy in his own right, offers a systemic path whereupon therapy takes place within the context of relational-fields. These relational fields can be internal (within the person), in the therapeutic encounter, and in broader contexts. It is through cruising between and among those fields that healing occurs (Gilligan, 1997).

### **The therapeutic encounter in NLPt**

The Systemic NLPt model is effective because it is not strictly bound to any one therapeutic approach. The therapist uses the principles and processes behind the techniques rather than applying techniques. The truth of a model is always secondary to its contextual relevance and usefulness.

The Neuro-Linguistic Psychotherapist (NLPt) is forever challenging her clients' schemas. She moves between perceptual positions (holding different views of the world) within therapy and outside it and uses feedback to change the way she works. She recognizes her own maps (or rules of reality) and keeps a constant check on them. She encourages her clients to do the same.

She communicates on various levels simultaneously, recognising the many possible levels of rapport. She works with multiple processes – communicating messages and meta-messages (messages about the messages), relating to levels, systems and cultures. It means she frequently uses hypnotic patterns and processes.

She recognises that the deepest orders of change concerns transforming the way we experience the world, and that it is difficult to accomplish it in straightforward ways (Keeney, 1983). She therefore uses parallel processes (stories, hypnosis, analogies, models), and cultivates recursive relationship with her own unconscious processes as well as her clients'.

She helps the client model his epistemology: the client learns how he creates reality, how he expands choices or limits himself. The client learns the rules that make up his world. The therapist trusts the system (person / family + information) to find a healthier context of applying itself. At the same time, she supplies a model of relationship to the client and she responds to him and changes according to his input (she supplies a cybernetic, feedback model).

She joins the client's world-view, assists him in expanding his reality – both from within his map (from within his schemas, e.g. associate / disassociate) and, even more importantly – in changing realities, in learning to build new ones. The therapist *holds* the client in the transitional stages of reality formation (Keeney, 1983; Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2001a).

She utilises the intentionality of the symptoms (the fact that they were solutions in a different context) (Eaton, 2001a; Keeney, 1983). She asks 'under which circumstance would the symptom be an asset?' and 'under which circumstances would the symptom be unnecessary?'

She focuses and sharpens her sensory acuity to recover lost processes that became 'labels' (feeling depressed became 'suffering from depression'). She utilises, encourages and continuously presents paradoxes, as a way to foster three orders of change: *First order change*: achieving outcomes in the system.

*Second order change*: alternating maps (changing the rules that govern the system)

*Third order change*: changing relationship between maps. Realising the context (social / cultural) within which sets of rules are made (e.g. cultural presuppositions) and challenging them to arrange the client differently in relation to them (ibid).

She engages in a dialogue<sup>17</sup> with the client, both de-constructing and reconstructing reality at all times (Gilligan, 1987; Keeney, 1983). She is very aware of her language, and is capable of using language both vaguely (to create trance and parallel processes) and accurately (to retrieve sensory input behind labels).

The Neuro-Linguistic Psychotherapist checks how the client positions her in the therapeutic relationship, recognising that therapeutic outcomes depend upon the relationship between therapist and client (Keeney, 1983).

She is usually goal-oriented, forming outcomes methodologically, while still '*holding*' an intention of a higher order, a context.

She examines the various levels of communication: semantic, syntactic and broader linguistic structures (indicating belief systems, values etc.), non-verbal communication and the relationship between them. She notices and points incongruities and helps the client develop an understanding of his structure (self-modelling).

She endeavours to use any and every legitimate resource available to her and to her client, within the therapeutic alliance or outside it to achieve the client's outcomes. She tries to utilise anything her client presents her with.

She regards information, communication and feedback as most valuable assets and endeavours to use them. She aspires to be inclusive of other points of view, of other maps. She is willing to try something else, aiming to be as flexible as she can in her responses.

She recognises her human limitations, knowing that she brings herself, her belief systems and 'maps' into the therapeutic encounter. Through recursive processes, she both tries to minimise the effect of her 'map' on the client (at least be aware of that) and aspires to expand her maps, and move between realities.

She tries to avoid discovering pathology, knowing that such discoveries contribute to the creation of pathology (Keeney, 1983).

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<sup>17</sup> Dialogical thinking had influenced NLP, most apparently Bateson, Erickson and Perls (see Bergman, 1974; Buber, 1923). I believe it was mainly the I-thou that was missed in the classic NLP modeling.

In the light of all that was written in this paper, and when appropriate, she might not do any of these things above.

NLPt can encourage change on many levels – behavioural, emotive, cognitive, ethical (value & belief) and identity. However, the highest possible level of change in NLPt is epistemological – the client can change the way he knows the world. He can further acquire tools to question, negotiate and keep changing the relationship between inside ('me') and outside ('you' / 'the world' / 'not me'), while understanding that even this distinction is only a possibility.

Since it is possible to strive and work systemically in any type of therapy (Morgan, 1998), systemic NLP can be inclusive and need not be in opposition to any school of therapy.

### **The NLPt in practice – an extreme example<sup>18</sup>**

'I have always been helpless around him (dad), he's a strong man; he's manipulative'. When he manipulates her, she crumbles – withdrawing and dissociating. Numbing herself, she knows it too well. She loses her resourcefulness – and what a resourceful woman she is. 'I feel like a little girl,' but she is forty.

So she is invited, with hypnotic language, to re-experience the feelings of hopelessness, of being trapped, of being manipulated. Her body-language changes, her skin tone becomes duller, her pulse quicker, her tonality low pitched and intermittent.

What must she feel? I try to imagine what it is like for her and ask her to look at herself from my place. 'I always withdraw there, I am always silent.' In my chair I am curious. The loud chat of my two inner supervisors suddenly ceases when I ask: 'Can I do to you something that you really wouldn't like?'

She says: 'YES.'

I have entered her map, her reality. She is hopeless – I am a man. I manipulate her. But she has already stepped outside it: we have a therapeutic contract; we have negotiated a manipulative intervention. I remind her of our 'stop it I mean it' signal. She has practised it before. I also hold her space and boundaries with safety. It's paradoxical. Yet she doesn't know what I'm about to do. Do I really know?

So, I sit on her. She becomes quiet.

She knows far too well how to respond: dissociating, abandoning herself, accepting in silence. After a minute she whispers: 'get off me.'

I refuse, 'you are far more comfortable than the chair.'

One more minute of silence. I try to feel what it is like for her, and my 'therapist' is slightly nervous – 'it's a high risk intervention,' says one of my inner supervisors, and

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<sup>18</sup> In the spirit of Frank Farrelly

I nod. Then, again, somewhat louder – ‘get off me, Asaf.’ Again, I refuse: “you’ll have to make me.”

She is softly spoken, she is feminine and elegant. I remind her of the ‘stop it’ signal, stepping with her outside of the therapeutic moment. After a couple of minutes, she starts shouting, pushing and hitting me. ‘You can shout however loud you want. You can hit me and push me but I am stronger than you and I know what’s good for you. And I stay.’

Silence. She has reached the edge of her reality. Beyond here it’s an uncharted territory. Beneath me, I can feel her body softening, giving up? My inner supervisors are slightly alarmed. One is saying: ‘Asaf, if it doesn’t work than it’s a really awful intervention;’ the other says: ‘well, as long as you are clear about what you are doing... but are you clear Asaf?’

Am I clear? I know she can change the frame; but I don’t know how.

Suddenly, she grabs my arms and folds them towards her, interlocking me tightly. I cannot move. I can hardly breath.

‘You want to stay here, that’s fine,’ she says, ‘but you aren’t going to move at all.’

My diaphragm tenses but my heart celebrates. My two supervisors are smiling. After a minute of suffocation, I JUST HAVE TO ESCAPE FROM HER. I slide down.

She looks at me, beaming. ‘It’s the first time I’ve realised how much I have learned from him.’ She had actively stepped out of the frame, of the world (while remaining in the therapeutic frame – she neither used the ‘stop it’ signal nor left the room). ‘I shall not be used or manipulated again,’ she says.

Into the next session she comes with a request: ‘I want to recreate my identity; I have realised how much of my identity was arranged around my fear of him.’<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

- Training in Classic-code NLP can teach you what to do.
- Training in New-code NLP can teach you how to do.
- In NLPt you learn how to think about how to do and what to do. You have no concrete rules or directives as to what to do, and not about how to do it, so it is far more challenging.

NLPt is a movement, not a thing. It is the context of therapy looking at itself and changing accordingly. It is not a static theory but an ever evolving and changing pattern of relationship between theory and clinic, technique and context. NLPt is about using the NLP presuppositions, and negotiating with other therapeutic models, with other contexts (self-relations, therapy, familial, social, cultural) (Eaton, 2001c).

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<sup>19</sup> The client’s exiting the double-bind was a demonstration of changing her world, which Bateson would still consider as learning level II (changing level II without going to level III). However, her statements thereafter and the following session indicate a higher order of learning, comparing two ‘contexts of contexts’ (Bateson, 1972), thus genuinely achieving learning level III.

Keeney writes: 'In therapy, improvisation welcomes conduct without understanding' (Keeney, 1990). And indeed, as Neuro-Linguistic-Psychotherapists we need to grow more comfortable in our refusal to conclusively define our practice. As long as we move, there is movement and when we cease from moving...

With mastery of techniques, curiosity and higher order intention, we stop doing 'a bag of tricks' but applying minds '*I do ME*' in a context. Moving between the two recursively, we retrieve the process behind the procedure and dare to trust our unconscious to do it ecologically.

I don't know what the systemic Neuro-Linguistic-Psychotherapist does.

I don't know how she does it.

But I know how she thinks when doing therapy: creatively, recursively, abductively, flexibly, curiously, and – perhaps more than anything – faithfully.

For in the end of the day we are left with courage and love, like Don Juan advised Carlos Castaneda: 'Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question... Does this path have a heart? All paths are the same: they lead nowhere... Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use' (Castaneda, 1968).

The Neuro-Linguistic-Psychotherapist helps the client find his own way into the hammock; his own rhythms of swinging; his own path with a heart.

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