

An interview with John Grinder 1996

source: <http://www.inspiritive.com.au/interview-john-grinder-1996/>

By Chris and Jules Collingwood

The interview was at the end of part one of a two-part seminar on Pattern Detection conducted in July 1996 in Boulder, Colorado with NLP Comprehensive. Part two was held in September 1996.

1. As one of the few individuals who has developed a whole new field of endeavour, do you have any thoughts regarding the circumstances that make it possible to be in that position?

There is a metaphor which is extremely common in western European traditions in which an investigator establishes his or her contribution while simultaneously paying tribute to the work which forms the foundation which makes possible their specific contribution.

This is typically expressed by noting that the new contributor can see farther than the original giants who established the foundation for their new work by standing on their shoulders. But for me, personally, this is quite misleading and not at all congruent with my experience.

Rather than a physical metaphor – that is, the additional height achieved by standing on the shoulders of the

giants who preceded me, it seems to me that what Bandler and I did in our original work – the classic code of NLP – was much more accurately captured by the idea of seeing in a totally different way rather than seeing farther.

So while one of the circumstances which made it possible for us to create NLP certainly was the previous work, especially by Russell, Turing, Godel, Chomsky, and Bateson as well as the specific models of Perls, Satir and Erickson, the actual value added by our activity was an audacious style of provoking the world by refusing the common sensical wisdom, most assuredly by rejecting the presuppositions of the vast majority of researchers active in the field, by seeking to extend the patterning to its limits and by creating the process tools (at a higher logical level than the content of the investigations) to enable others to follow the paths of discovery which lie all around us. As Stephen Jay Gould said beautifully (*The Panda's Thumb*, p243):

The best thinkers have the imagination to create organizing visions, and they are sufficiently adventurous (or egotistical) to float them in a complex world that can never say "yes" in all detail.

Thus, I believe, anyone seeking to create such a paradigm shift would be wise to develop a healthy respect for the research which has preceded while cultivating an equally healthy disrespect for the presuppositions for precisely the same body of research. As George Bernard Shaw once said (corrected for sexist language):

“Reasonable people try to adapt themselves to the world

Unreasonable people try to adapt the world to themselves

That’s why all progress depends on unreasonable people.”

So be it!

2. When you and Richard Bandler were first developing NLP did you have any ideas or expectations about what would happen to it over time?

My memories about what we thought at the time of discovery (with respect to the classic code we developed – that is, the years 1973 through 1978) are that we were quite explicit that we were out to overthrow a paradigm and that, for example, I, for one, found it very useful to plan this campaign using in part as a guide the excellent work of Thomas Kuhn (The Structure of Scientific Revolutions) in which he detailed some of the conditions which historically have obtained in the midst of paradigm shifts. For example, I believe it was very useful that neither one of us were qualified in the field we first went after – psychology and in particular, its therapeutic application; this being one of the conditions which Kuhn identified in his historical study of paradigm shifts. Who knows what Bandler was thinking?

3. If so, in what ways has it conformed and deviated from your expectations?

One of the expectations which I personally carried at the time of discovery and development of NLP was that **people interested in our work would cleanly make the distinction between NLP and applications of NLP.** My hope at the time was that given this distinction, there would arise a group of committed men and women who would recognize the meta levels tools which we had either discovered (the Milton Model.....), or created (the verbal patterns of the Meta Model or Precision Model, Representational Systems....), and go out and identify and create new models of excellence to offer the world. This has not happened and is very disappointing to me. NLP is popularly represented and commonly practiced at least one logical level below what it was clearly understood to be at the time by Bandler and me.

This **inability to distinguish either behaviorally or cognitively the consequences and applications of NLP from core NLP itself (modelling of excellence) is extremely commonplace.**

4. How would you like NLP to progress from here on?

As I indicated in my response to question 3, I would like to see NLP cleanly distinguished from its spin-offs – its applications – and a dedicated group of modellers go after new models of excellence. This would constitute for

me a validation that the message I set out to deliver to the world has been received.

[I would like to see NLP cleanly distinguished from its applications - John Grinder Click To Tweet](#)

5. What prompted you and Judith DeLozier to develop the New Code?

The context which stimulated the development of the New Code by DeLozier and myself in the mid-80's contained two characteristics which I wished at the time to correct:

There were a large number of people who had trapped themselves in a ritualistic practice in a mechanical way of the patterns which we had created. The New Code carries with it an elegant simplification of the classic code as well as certain presuppositional traps which serve as a gate against ritualistic behaviour. This was one of the objectives of the development of the New Code. In effect, the New Code was the creation of a second description which I hoped would shake people out of their ritualistic behaviour. Alas, the net contribution was to create a set of new exercises and patterns which were incorporated into the rituals of the trapped practitioners of NLP.

[The New Code carries with it an elegant simplification of the classic code - John Grinder Click To Tweet](#)

The second objective I had in the development of the New Code was to provide a context at a logical level much

higher than had been previously attempted. This involves the setting of ethical, cultural and intellectual frames which indicate in what way specifically, NLP is a step or stage in a larger historical process – that is, where it fits into the western cultural and intellectual development.

6. How would you describe the difference between the Classic Code and the New Code NLP?

The New Code differs in two important ways from the Classic Code:

One, as mentioned above is the placement of the higher level frames to indicate the positioning of NLP with respect to larger issues.

Two, the New Code contains a series of gates which presuppose a certain and to my way of thinking appropriate relationship between the conscious and unconscious parts of a person purporting to train or represent in some manner NLP. This goes a long way toward insisting on the presence of personal congruity in such a person. In other words, a person who fails to carry personal congruity will in general find themselves unable to use and/or teach the New Code patterns with any sort of consistent success.

This is a design I like very much – it has the characteristic of a self correcting system.

On the other hand, as we say, these built in gates have had the result that few people who were originally trained

in the classic code of NLP are able to adapt themselves to the New Code.

7. There is a common misconception both within and outside the NLP community to the effect that some people are labelling themselves or others as if "a visual", "an auditory" or "a kinaesthetic" were terms of identity. Could you describe the function of representation systems and their place in NLP?

Yes, easily! The entire problem would be resolved if anyone using the representational system material (e.g. eye movement patterns, unconscious selection of predicates....), would recognize and act congruently with the following proposition:

The temporal value of a representational system diagnosis is 30 seconds.

This would ensure behaviour congruent with the original intent I carried at the time we discovered the patterning – namely, its use as a precise way of knowing what the unconscious preferences and strategies (and failures) of the person in front of me has from moment to moment – that is, a very precise form of feedback in which the practitioner samples every 30 seconds to verify the continuing preference or strategy (or failure to access and employ one of these great resources).

8. If you could change three things between the origins of NLP and the present time, with hindsight,

what would they be, and what would you imagine the effects to have been?

Sorry, I'll pass on this one. It is a question about what would have happened had I done something which I did not do. Since I am never going to do this, I have no interest in exploring it. The principle is clear for me – I will not attend to issues which I will not act on. For me, this is a waste of time, and it may be a guiding principle for someone interested in actually accomplishing something in the world.

[I will not attend to issues which I will not act on. For me, this is a waste of time - John Grinder Click To Tweet](#)

9. If someone seeking their first NLP training were to ask you to advise them on choosing their training providers, and how to get the most out of their training, what criteria would you suggest they use, and how would you suggest they approach their training?

Yes, to me this is an important question. First, I would say to such a person that they select by the congruency of the trainer. More specifically, I would recommend that they deliberately provoke the potential trainer and appreciate the way in which the potential trainer handles their state and the response they make – more importantly at the relationship level than at the content level.

Secondly, I would ask the person entering a training to be an active skeptic – more specifically, that they question everything, demanding first hand evidence (that is, personal experience) for each and every claim issued by the trainer(s). In addition, it is my ethic that a trainer has a responsibility for ensuring that each pattern presented includes three elements (the sequence of presentation by the trainer may vary as a function of their style):

The definition of the pattern, including its decomposition into its elements and their sequencing
the consequences that a congruent person employing the pattern may anticipate when the pattern is used

The condition which must be present in the context to indicate that this particular pattern (as opposed to some other pattern) is the appropriate one to use in this particular context.

Further that a person entering an NLP training make two personal arrangements with themselves:

That they successfully resist the tendency to translate what is being presented into mental maps that they already carry (e.g. oh! Anchoring is just like Pavlovian conditioning). The patterns which are at the heart of NLP are not like any previous X, Y and Z, and the person who translates into X, Y and Z robs him or herself of the experience of learning something new.

That they test each pattern offered through personal experience for which they arrange to enter a state of congruity for the test period. To test a pattern

incongruently is to waste your time.

[To test a pattern incongruently is to waste your time - John Grinder Click To Tweet](#)

10. What background skills and knowledge would you like to expect working NLP trainers to possess?

Personal congruity, sparkling intelligence, a deep, bottomless curiosity, a driving desire to discover new patterning, a phobic class response to repeating themselves, a continuous scanning for evidence that they are mistaken in every aspect of their personal and professional beliefs, solid personal ethics, physical fitness, actual real world experience in any field in which they intend to present NLP and an excellent sense of humour.

11. In recent years you have been doing very little in the way of formal NLP training. What have you and your partner Carmen Bostic St. Clair been doing instead? Where are you attending to the world and what for?

Within the corporation QUANTUM LEAP, partner, Carmen Bostic St. Clair and I have focused ourselves on co-developing at the group level (companies, work teams, governments, institutions, sporting teams,...) a new set of tools and models roughly equivalent in precision and power to what Bandler and I originally developed at the personal level. Our work thus typically takes the form of a consultancy, often initially labeled Re-Engineering or Re-

Design of Critical Business Processes, into which we always accomplish the following:

- the client organization is more productive
- the client organization is more profitable
- the members of the organization (typically through the mechanism of work teams which ultimately involve all members of the company) achieve local control over the work processes in which they are involved (they become owners of those processes) as intelligent and participating members of the company, recognizing and valued by the co-workers, and demanding, recognizing and valuing the quality of the contribution from other members of the organization.

In part this activity is a concrete expression of a commitment to make the world we live in a better place and the recognition that if we are to realize this grand goal, one of the leverage points we can use to succeed is the work context. Since everyone participates in some way or another in the work context, to create a new standard (or paradigm) in this field would have the greatest influence.

12. Your company is called Quantum Leap Inc. What prompted you and Carmen to name your company Quantum Leap?

QUANTUM LEAP was originally created by Carmen Bostic

in 1987. While engaged in a business consultancy contract for her working in some of the companies which she as the CEO ran, I recognized in Carmen Bostic a genius in the fields of negotiation, relationships, and business. I joined her corporation in 1988.

The word QUANTUM (contrary to popular use) refers to the smallest unit of energy (or light) while the word LEAP suggests a discontinuity. Thus the phrase QUANTUM LEAP contains a tension approaching paradox. The idea is quite simple: in total opposition to Michael Hammer who insists that Business Process Re-Engineering begins with a wiping clean of the organizational structure in order to design from nothing the new company, we take pride in being able to identify the what and the where to put that what to initiate the change required for a corporation to succeed in achieving its potential, according to the three criteria listed above. The alert reader will recognize that we are referring to the necessity of systems thinking and actions congruent with it in succeeding in changing organizations – something often spoken of and rarely achieved.

More specifically, the phrase/name QUANTUM LEAP refers to our ability to make the smallest difference consistent with achieving the greatest change for all classes of our clients. This correctly implies that one of the features of our consultancy is rapid and ecological change.

13. Pattern detection is obviously a topic that is important to you. Would you like to comment on its place in NLP?

Pattern Detection is indeed one of the first steps in the modeling process, and clearly, without it, it is not possible to create a model. Or more generally, without the ability to recognize (some people would argue that the more appropriate verb would be a blend of create and recognize) patterns, learning itself of any type is impossible – I agree. Thus what could be more fundamental than the ability to detect pattern.

[Pattern Detection is indeed one of the first steps in the modeling process - John Grinder Click To Tweet](#)

14. Carmen Bostic St. Clair and you will be making a rare Australian appearance in May 2007 to present a seminar on advanced use of metaphor. What is its significance in terms of individuals' approaches to the world?

All which is not concrete is metaphoric – clearly, this involves the vast majority of our everyday experiences. The structure of the unconscious – easily the factor most influential in our success in life – or more correctly said, the relationship which we have with our unconscious is easily the factor most important in our success in life – is that of metaphor.

The unconscious contains no nouns, only verbs – the part

of language which carries the representation of the relationships and processes which determine the quality of our lives. This in part accounts for the fact that the typical production of the unconscious is metaphoric – dreams, poems, dances, songs and stories. In this presentation by Carmen Bostic and myself, we will address ourselves with the participation of the members of the seminar to two primary issues:

- the discovery, examination and replacement or refinement of the deep metaphors only dimly glimpsed which govern our lives.
- the specific strategies available which we can use to identify or create newly the metaphors we need for specific purposes – such as influencing our bosses, spouses and children (assuming they are different) at the unconscious level – an extremely satisfying way of influencing important people in your life.

15. What is the significance of metaphor with reference to the success of organizations?

The influence of metaphor with respect to organizations takes two obvious forms:

- the mental maps often called the vision, the mission, the ethics or value statement which guide the behaviors of the members of an organization can be made explicit or conscious only to a limited degree. Much of the success of the coordinated efforts of

well-intentioned people who form the core of an organization depends on unconscious (or partly unconscious) maps which form a larger and encompassing image of the direction, mission, values,... of the organization. In the case that these unconscious maps are coordinated, the organization will succeed. To the degree that they are not, there will be grave difficulties in organization and much friction and uncoordinated movement, with the team members pulling in different directions.

- the corporate mythology is the official mechanism by which the organization builds its own inspiring (or not) image to which the members of the organization subscribe (or not) at the unconscious level – this is strongly connected with the values of the organization, especially with respect to its customer base. Thus, the organizational mythology typically contains founder stories, unexpected and against all odds successes emphasizing certain specific qualities of the people of the organization involved. Once recognized by the leadership of an organization this becomes a powerful tool to influence the behavior and values of the company members.

16. What are the benefits an individual would be likely to derive through attending the Advanced use of Metaphor seminar in Australia?

The benefits I would insist on walking away from the Advanced use of Metaphor seminar presented by Carmen

Bostic and John Grinder in Australia in May 2007 would be:

- the ability to recognize deep metaphors in my own life, in the lives of close friends and in organizations such as the company in which I work
- the ability to design new metaphors, including deep metaphors which carry the values and associations at the unconscious level which I want to enhance in myself, the people close to me and the organization in which I operate as a productive member of society,
- the ability to implement new metaphors, including deep metaphors which carry the values and associations at the unconscious level which I want to enhance in myself, the people close to me and the organization in which I operate as a productive member of society,
- the ability to influence others at the unconscious level through metaphor
- the feeling of having had a hell of a good time learning all of the above.

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Chris Collingwood

Christopher Collingwood, BA (Psych)., MAppSci Social Ecology, a director of Inspiritive Pty Ltd., has over 21 years experience in coaching, consulting and leading seminars in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. He holds the Graduate Certificate in NLP, is an NLP Trainer Assessor, and has undertaken extensive training with the major developers of NLP, including Dr. John Grinder, co-originator of Neuro-Linguistic Programming.