

Interview with Stephen Gilligan, Marah, Germany Trance Camp 3, 14.10.2009

By Heinrich Frick

(Headlines instead of the Questions)

The three generations of trance work

The first generation of Hypnotic work was basically the traditional approach, which for the most practical purposes is a direct authoritarian approach. And some of the most important implicit premises are in order to change-work that the client or the patient conscious mind is not very helpful, so in a fact hypnosis should – quote – knock it out. So have a person go into trance and that their conscious mind so goes away and disappears. How ever at the same time, the first generation, the patients unconscious mind is not consider to be very creative or intelligent and rather something, that needed to submit to some sort of programming and to the authoritarian suggestions. So knock out the conscious mind of the patient and then implanting new more positive suggestions in their unconscious. There are a lot of limitations I think practically to this approach – perhaps most notable that anything –, that doesn't involve the patients own resources, the patients own way. So rejection by what might be thought of a psychological immune system.

So Milton Erikson I think, made a radical break threw in having a very different approach to hypnosis. First of all, he saw trance not as artificial, not as some thing that was primarily consequence of the hypnotic suggestion, that trance was something that was in the fabric of human consciousness. That is very, very different. Furthermore he saw that the unconscious mind was highly creative and so he emphasized that the way that each person would experience trance would be unique to them. So this feature of uniqueness and creative unconsciousness and naturalistic trance really shifted hypnosis form first generation to second generation in which you could be able to appeal to the creative unconscious of the patient. However I think Erikson continued the first generations mistake – in my view of seeing – (to see) the conscious mind as basically not very intelligent and not an important collaborator in terms of any sort important chance process. That's way Erikson would use confusion or dissociation.

And so even if the patient did experience a change, the change would not produce what I would call a generative shift in the person's way of approaching the world. And probably the most practical way of expressing that, would be because of the many experiences that I have found with different patients and students of Erikson's over the many years since I started training with him. And I found to my great disappointment, that when these people who had connection with Erikson, would arrive at the next inevitable crisis or a problem in there life, that what they have learned form Erikson was a version of "I'm going into trance and imaging, what Milton Erikson would tell me what to do". And I see that as problematic in a sense of it really isn't teaching a person there own inherent capacity to meet the challenges of life. They are still in a sense carrying around some idealistic presence of a great hypnotist that is Milton Erikson in there minds.

So the third generation, what we try to remember to do is, that by looking at the fact that the conscious mind is highly intelligent – I think no body would doubt about that – but more importantly it can be organized in a way that it can be a great collaborator and in a mutual respecting relationship with what we become to call the creative unconscious. So this equal referencing and this equal respect in generative Trance work, which is what I call the third generation, what involves an appreciation of the conscious mind and the creative unconscious mind of the patient or the client. I don't think that Erikson was fully aware of it

and I would say on his behalf that I think that it is very important to appreciate that Erikson was from a very different time. And I don't know if the culture at the time that he was practicing the 30., 40., 50. really would allow such a thing which is allowed now. I think in that cultural time there was a sort of "father knows best" attitude, where it wasn't much appreciated that within each person there was the possibility of a creative intelligence. So if you were a housewife, a baker or a farmer and if you had a problem you would go and see the doctor. The doctor had all of the intelligence. But we are in a different time now. And certainly in the states there is not the same regard for the doctor. But there is an appreciation of the need for the patient to be an equal collaborator with his own health and his own healing. I think that cultural shift has allowed us to begin to appreciate some version of the notion "the kingdom of good is within each person". That is all of the different functions that used to be isolated in certain social worlds like the doctor has all the healing power; we begin to realize that the healing doctor is within each person. And he can be activated to some extent within each person and that's what we're trying to do. We might say – a simple way of thinking – the third generation of hypnosis is how to teach our patients and clients to become their own Milton Erikson.

Way from the second to the third generation

Practically in my own experience I had a sort of life crisis, if you will, around the age of 37. When I started studying with Milton Erikson I was 19. I was quite a devotee, so to speak, and really tried to approach things, that I sensed, that Erikson did. And I always thought that all I had to do was almost like to flip the button and I could connect with my own version of the unconscious. But 37 years old my father died, a month later my daughter was born. And those two crucially monumental experiences created unexpectedly a major change. And something inside of me, a part of me, that I could always trust going into a trance, somehow for whatever reason shut down. And I was pretty confused and distressed about it. What I could tap into some of this basic Eriksonian idea, about maybe this is a gift then if I can open to it and listen to it and I can be able to do some learning from that. And it became clear to me that my inner learning was trying to teach me something. And what was really pointing out was that I had no father anymore and that I had become a father and so in some ways it was just trying to stop being Erikson's son. And to operate under his umbrella it was time for me to articulate what I thought was some of the emerging differences.

So the notion of Self Relation in a nutshell is this resonant connection between the cognitive self – what in hypnosis we call the conscious mind – and also what I come to call the somatic mind. The Body-Mind which I would say is the first, not the only unconscious. And when we get a good combination between those two you get a Relational Self what I call more now a Generative Self. That is a sort of tertian (third) mind that contains all of the helpful aspects of the two different minds plus the emerging properties also carries additional properties that are very, very helpful for creativity, for healing and transformation.

In respect to hypnosis, including Eriksonian Hypnosis, I will say, that the three main differences that where part of the original Self Relation form, hypnosis is first and almost more focused upon the body's experience. So partly from the martial arts partly from other types of psychotherapy there is a sense of how the unconscious is experiencing that as somatic phenomena. In terms of different feelings in the bodies, different energies in the bodies, so forth and so on. So it be a more tuned in focus to how you experience that exactly in the body, where do you exactly experience that in the body, so that somatic element

become more relevant, yes, the same what Eugen Gendlin called the felt sense, a very important aspect.

Second, the notion of trance become one that also could be an externally oriented phenomenon. So in both, the first and the second generations of trance, generally thought of as trance, is something that you had to close your eyes. So you have to go away from the external world. One of the things that you learned in a performance art such as the martial art like Aikido, if you close your eyes, you're in deep trouble! But to be able to function at these very high levels of creativity, where you have to have this special concentration, a special sense of creative flow, what we find in trance. That those experiences in the martial arts are different kinds of trances as a trance in which you had your eyes open and in which your awareness oriented into the external world. That would begin to include that as a legitimate possible way to experience trance. We begin to see that trance can be use in many more contexts, in many more ways, then in the traditional thought. As to say for example the therapists himself or herself can be able to skillfully use a certain type of trance at certain times, not all the time but at certain times, working with the patient in a way, that actually allows you to feel more connected to the patient, more connected to what's happening in the external situation plus or more connected to the creative unconscious. So the externalization of trance is the second difference.

And the third and perhaps the most important difference is what we call the "internalization of the Erikson Function". I was just alluding to this fact that Erikson didn't really respect the patient's conscious mind. In the traditional hypnosis he took it over for the patient and he said, the unconscious is intelligent, but he didn't explain why the unconscious was acting so stupidly before Erikson was on to it. So you could even say: The unconscious is intelligent but then again we're left with problem and what he's doing in the office? If it is so brilliant, why it is creating problems? Or you could say well, it's a brilliant technique of the hypnotist for example Erikson. But that's the difference that makes the difference or what we say in Self Relation is something about to fit the conversation between the two minds. But that's where Erikson was a genius at, was being able to structure, organize his conscious mind to optimally fit with the patterns of the patients unconscious mind. And that's the winning ticket that leads us to the question, was it only Erikson that can do that, if so, we're in trouble, or is it only the highly trained priests that could do it? If so, it has limitations to, or is this something that we could teach our patients to do, to be able to have attitude of a relational connection to their creative unconscious that will allow them – again to use the metaphor – to become their own Milton Erickson? So this internalization into the client of the – what I we call the "Erikson Function" – that way of talking skillfully to the unconscious is the third major difference.

The so called "Field"

We are talking about two levels of fields and the first level we call dynamic field. We say human beings are always operating in larger contexts. So, the physical body is a field for ones thoughts, culture is a field, family is a field, the person may work in the field of medicine, the personal history is a field or a context within which each experience is navigated, meanings are made, life is lived. There is a very, very strong influence on the person's consciousness. Now the persons can be in a very conservative or negative field, where they feel shut down or limited. And the negative field of the family, if you will, really puts them back into a negative state. What we can do with our awareness is, begin to move our attention to open it into the field in a very, very positive way. People do this already with everyday states of well being. So if you listen to music which you really like, your attention

and your awareness swells, it opens. And you begin to feel a space, if you will, a field, if you will, where all the different patterns of that music give you an expanded sense of consciousness. That's one of our reasons. And when we are in nature, we take a walk in the woods, we feel a sense of well being and start to open up and you feel a part of something bigger. That's what we mean by the field. And most people experience the field only under extremely positive circumstances. So when they are in love, when they're in a highly positive place and if that's the only condition under which you can experience, this it has a limited value. What we are looking for in these work is, is it possible to be able to access and activate an open a positive field of wellbeing in adversarial and negative circumstances? For example when somebody is exploring a negative trauma, when they're struggling with a feeling of panic, is it possible that we can open a state of well being when our attention is wider than the problem? So that when we have them connected to the problem that their first attention, the first awareness, is not in the problem, which would probable defeat them, but it's in the positive space of well being, that they're holding around the problem. So that is a very general introductory sense of what I mean by field. And what we are looking for this work is to find some technical means by which we can be able to help the client to be able to do that. So that their attention is resting in this well being, than rather engage with the difficult challenges of the problem state.

The word Hypnosis

Instead of the word hypnosis I use Generative Trance. Because the distinction I would make is, that trance is very different from Hypnosis and simply put, trance is the natural experience that happens from within, in response to certain conditions and Hypnosis is one of these social, psychological rituals, that has developed in the west as a container to be able to allow and to be able to shape the natural experience of Trance. That is very different from a traditional trance, which says trance is an artifact of suggestion, that it comes form hypnosis. We are saying trance does not come from hypnosis, it comes from life itself. Hypnosis is the human context – one of them – that we use as a sort of a master–container navigational guide for trance. So unfortunately the word Hypnosis carries a lot of negative baggage. It carries this idea of a person's experience controlled from outside which even if it was done in a phenomenal way, has a limiting effect on the creative human capacities of the patient. So we can reshape it in terms of – I think that was what Erikson was trying to do – to say what you do is your hypnotic technique is shaped around the experience that is presented by the patient. So rather you think of hypnosis, as something that patients fits into and as Erikson used to say, as a therapist you do not have the luxury of having a theory. We can say in the some way you don't have the luxury of having a fixed hypnotic technique. This is something that you looking to do, to provide a safe positive resourceful way or what ever the inner psychobiological experiences of trances is, that it can be able to have a safe place which can be useful for healing purposes.

C.G. Jung

I would never have the grandiosity to answer the question what Jung would have profited from Generative Trance. I have to large photographs framed in my office, one is Erikson and one is Jung. So I think he's really one of the great geniuses. What I do think is, we just need to appreciate that psycho-technical sophistication was not very great 100 years ago. Those great pioneers had some astonishing courageous break threw ideas, but they didn't really had some of the technical methods, that would allow his ideas to be come to fruit. We also of course benefit from a lot of changes that have happened culturally in a 100 years. The stuff that we are to allow to support our patients in doing now is so fare beyond, what would be

permissible. The sorts of feelings that are available, the sort of life changes and that we are able to encourage our patients to make. You couldn't have done that 100 years ago, it just wouldn't have been appropriate. So I have a lot of respect but, I would say that some of the technical ways in which you could help people to connect towards inside of their body, to be able to shape their cognitive conversation within and to be able to – in an intentional skillful way – open to the creative space beyond the individual consciousness. There have been considerable advances in this. That if you would now apply those to some of Jung's inside from 100 years ago, would really take Jung's work in a new way. I'm really looking forward to that Red Book as many people are. Because I think, what he did, what Erikson did, what only few people did, is that he courageously opened to the journey of the unconscious mind. And what we're talking about a little bit before, he did not approach the work with his patients primarily from an intellectual point of view. He was an active participant in the journey through the creative unconscious. I think that the Red Book is probably something everybody is looking forward to. Erikson's first way of knowing about trance was through his one experience. And so I would say that's one of the things we can learn from that is, that if we are going to say to the people, that we work with that you can trust the unconscious mind, carefully, skillfully and not recklessly and that you could learn from the unconscious mind, we better be able to practice that in our one life. I think this gives us the confidence and the skill base and the ethical and the moral authority to be able to introduce this idea to our patients in a way that can transform their life.

The future

I got too much Irish catholic in me to not be able to be over pessimistic. But what I do know is that life carries infinite possibilities. That if we put the effort in that and that we open to the possibilities, we can always be surprised how much more is available than what we think. And secondly, to be able to live like that – it's not natural to me, I come from a very depressed family – but to live like that, is so much more rewording than to live in a pessimistic and limited way. That basically because the path of least resistance at the end, that becomes a path of least pain. So like most people I've done it, the other way and I know from me that the life just gets so unbearable, if I lead it in a closed, fearful or angry way. I am trying for the path of least resistance and so it becomes one of those things I learned from Erikson, is that you can learn something new every day. I think that we know that inevitable sufferings and inevitable pain is one part of each human life, they are not only bearable but we can find that they are not the main thing. The main thing is to be able to enjoy this incredible miracle and gift of life that we have been given.

Heinrich Frick: Thank you very much Steve!