Jaap Hollander, Ph.D., Lucas Derks, Ph.D. and Bruce Tanenbaum, M.D.

The Modelling of Magic

Pragmagical NLP-processes based on modeling native magical-religious practices

One rainy day in the early eighties, when we were in a university library sifting through the literature on group hypnosis, we hit upon an interesting article by Dr. David Akstein, from Rio de Janeiro, entitled "Terpsichore Trance Therapy, a New Hypnopsychotherapeutic Method" (Akstein, 1973). In his article, Akstein described how he had translated the ritual trance practices of the Umbanda and Candomble religions of Brazil into a more Western form of hypnotic psychotherapy. This method, which he called Terpsichore Trance Therapy (TTT) after Terpsichore, the Greek muse of the dance, involved concentrating on a desired state ("mono-ideism"), followed by hyperventilation and ecstatic dancing on fast drum rhythms. Highly interested in this innovative method, we started experimenting with it and our first experiences were quite encouraging. We remember, for instance, how during our first trial session with TTT an anorgastic client experienced her first orgasm. Furthermore we could confirm that, as Akstein had stated, during a TTT session a large number of known trance phenomena occur, ranging from sensory distortion and age regression to dissociation and posthypnotic amnesia. Over the next decade or so we had many exciting and productive encounters with David Akstein and we embarked on a long modeling-voyage that led us to diverse trance rituals in Brazil, Morocco and the USA.

Somewhere along the way we realized *that magical practices are the dominant psychotherapeutic method on this planet,* both culturally and historically speaking. For what do people do when they have psychosocial problems they cannot solve? In our culture they go to see a

therapist or a doctor. But if we look beyond the limits of our own time and culture, we see that the more common pattern is to take it higher up. People with problems turn to a priest, a shaman or a witch doctor in order either to enlist the help of spirits, demons, ancestral souls or other powerful non-material entities, or to fight them off. The global pattern of goal-directed psycho-social change is not one where a therapist or a doctor speaks with a patient. The dominant pattern is one where a priest or a shaman performs a ritual in order to regulate cosmic energies for the benefit of his client. And this regulation, viewed from the belief systems belonging with it, ensures that the sick heal, the insecure gain confidence, the unemployed find work, marital conflicts are settled, businesses find new customers, unruly children do what their parents tell them, etc. Our own Western culture is one of the few where this is, to an large extent, otherwise. When we look through the ages and across cultures, we find that people who want to turn their life around in a major way, will seek *religious solutions of a magical (meaning: goal-directed) nature.*

From this perspective we started modelling magic (although this term may not be anthropologically correct for some of the practices we studied). In other words: we started approaching the magical powers of priests, witch doctors and shamans with the classic NLP-question: "How does he (or she) do it?" This entailed our going to Brazil to observe Candomble possession rituals, for instance, and to Morocco to observe Gnawa dancers. Based on our direct experience and our dissociated observation, we endeavoured to define the beliefs, the mental strategies and the overt behaviour of both priest/shaman and believer/client. Subsequently, we translated these "pragmagical patterns" into structured techniques adapted to our own culture. By using them in our "Pragmagics" workshops in Europe and the USA, we further adapted and refined these techniques.

Our mission with pragmagics, then, is one of *transmission:* to translate the magical practices of traditional cultures into procedures that Westerners can benefit from, just as David Akstein did with the trance rituals of Umbanda.