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Peace, Love and Computers: A step outside NLP's epistemology

What fascinates me most, is to understand how conversations can change your way of seeing the world, and then the world itself.

—Theodore Zeldin

Neuro-linguistic what?

'Neuro-linguistic what?' I remember asking.

'Neuro-linguistic Programming,' my friend said with a touch of indulgence.

'Why the hell "programming"?' I asked

'Well . . . well . . . programming. It kind of has to do with the way the brain works,' muttered my friend.

'Do humans work like computers?' I was surprised.

That was twelve years ago; my friend and I were sitting out on a terrace in the Paris sun and I was hearing about NLP for the first time. I can remember how desperate my friend sounded when it came to explaining the 'programming' bit. I was left bewildered at the idea that humans worked like computers.

I had seen a lot of computers as an engineer. Smart computers, laptop computers, supercomputers, punch-card computers, etc. The essence of computers, I had learned a long time ago, is that they are dumb. However smart they pretend to be, it's always possible to push them over the edge if you try hard enough. They're good at pretending though and they've learnt a lot of interesting tricks over the last thirty years.

NLP caught my fancy straight away so I went through a cycle of learning it, using it, teaching it and then trying to make sense of it. Doing things the other way round might have been better, but then