

Hypnose und Kognition

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Interview mit Paul Carter, Ph.D.

W. Gerl (WG): Paul, you are – as I overlook the development of Ericksonian approach in our country, and in particular that of the M.E.G. – for us the most important person who came from the United States to seed and spread Milton's ideas and techniques. About ten years ago we met the first time, and – after having organized workshops for John Grinder and Judy Delozier, which were exciting experiences – I wanted you to cooperate with us (that time the Institut für Integrierte Therapie) on a regular basis. I was impressed by the personal style you (and your partner Stephen Gilligan) did the teaching and realized this learning to be fruitful for me.

The comprehensive training program we developed was the precursor of the later M.E.G. program, which then integrated a selection of others of Erickson's disciples (Sidney Rosen, Jeff Zeig, for example). The attendees of your courses in the late seventies represent the main portion of the "first generation" of Ericksonians in Germany and other, neighbouring countries.

Now, sometimes, when reflecting my personal opinions about our existence, our work, and about hypnotherapy in particular, I wonder: How is Paul experiencing the development of hypnotherapy in the last ten years; what changes occurred in his own opinions from the time we met. What are the steps in your personal development you think are important to be shared with us?

P. Carter (PC): Well, now the most important thing is changing the focus ... my old focus in my hypnotherapeutic relationship was really on my relationship with the client. That was the most important on our relationship. And now I'm making it much bigger than that, - so that now it focuses more on the clients' relationship with themselves – and my relationship with myself – and the clients' relationship with every person around them, close, and me as one in the other people – and the clients' relationship and my relationship to what is outside of our close circle: the earth, the sky, the elements, the animals, the plants, the other people of the community and other nations – coexisting. And, it's been a tremendous relief to do that, to make it larger – you know, to include much more than just my relationship with the client. That's, I think, may be the biggest change for me that I'm aware of, now.

WG: You say "relationship", on all levels one can think. This makes me a bit curious about how would this change in focus influence the encounter and the process of your actual being with the person?

PC: Hmmh ... I don't think it changes it in any particular way (laughter). It changes my feeling – and so it changes the context of the work (...) I move – further away and closer – it's something like that; it's both. I'm touching people more, now, for example – if you want to take that as one specific behavior. I'm touching people more than I did, before.

WG: You said: It's a relief. – What do you relieve with this widened scope of awareness?

PC: The dependency on just me and my client. And the dependency for support for power on our relationship. May be traditionally, the idea was to begin with our relationship and then to slowly open it. But I find now it's more important (I don't know if it's a rule, but at least where I am now): From the beginning I'm much more aware that this person has support from the earth, from other people in her life – even if they don't understand it. And part of my question is: How can this person become aware of: there is support – because they are not. Most people, who are sick, they are not aware of support; they feel no support.

WG: Do I understand you right: In the first approach (focus on relationship between two persons) you ask: What resources can the person rediscover during the therapeutic work within herself and in the relationship with you?

PC: With me. Especially with me.

WG: and now you are relieving this and yourself by reminding you and the person of the fact that, as a human being, as a living organism he is in contact with the whole world.

PC: Yes, and I am too! To say: It's my focus, too.

WG: So, there is no disconnection/separation, but connection/unity, all the way, and you are keeping this in mind, rediscovering it, communicating it to the person (?).

PC: Hmmh ... making it literally, for example, the elements become a part of the work. So that I am much more sensitive to asking a person to be aware of how this tree affects them, or how breathing this air affects them ... or hearing the sound of the river, or hearing the sound of the cars pass by ... And to pay attention to it, so that they become aware of their relationship with those parts of their world.

WG: What you just demonstrated is: "Become aware of the actual, ongoing moment – what is your experience, now?"

PC: Hmmh - which we always did. You could just say: Well, that's the Pacing. And that's where we started, you know, ten years ago, is: What are you aware of? And: Maybe you hear the car passing by, and maybe you see the wind binding the tree, and you're nodding your head. But the thought, ten years ago was: Okay, I'm saying that in order to move somewhere else, in order to lead to trance (whatever that is) – and, now, my thinking is different with that. I am not saying that simply to lead somewhere. I'm saying that actually to connect somebody with – or to become aware of those connections that they experience.

WG: - Not to lead him somewhere but to connect him with where he is, already?

PC: Ja ... ja. That's something that I think was always before I began hypnosis. My beginning was in family-, communication-, and gestalttherapy, and there the emphasis was always, in my training: Where are you right now? – and that's what you develop. And: What are you feeling right now? You say the same in client centered therapy, you know. It's just: Where are you right now? It is almost like the idea of leading was more a part of hypnosis than the gestalt awareness or unfolding in the client centered process. So, it is more like a circle that has happened, I've noticed in my work. It has become, once again, central: this idea of just developing what is right now. And, everything that I found in hypnosis, for example leading, I find now by just developing what is right now. It's really interesting. I needed to go through the circle to learn about all these different places you can go in hypnosis. And, what I've discovered now is: When I work with people and I just develop what is so, what they actually experience, and develop it more, built it more – so that they actually see, feel, hear, taste, move, express, connect what is going on right now – all of the hypnotic phenomena are present.

WG: Can I say, in other words: You change the state of mind, or, enter with the person a different state called trance in hypnosis by just focusing on the already existing connections with the world: on sensory data the person may have been unaware of (?)

PC: Hmmh – what I do is: I break the trance that the person is in by connecting them again more.

WG: This is the process we call "dehypnotizing."

PC: "Dehypnosis", ja, right. I think it's more accurate. Because first we are connecting and through developing what is, through developing what the person really experiences you break the boundaries of their consciousness at that time – you go beyond them. So the trance that they were in, starts to change.

WG: So, can one say: The insufficient trances they were living in are broken and they are experiencing choices and become, potentially, free to develop a more "participating consciousness", becoming deeply involved with life, - that means, they are developing an alternative, life supporting "healthy" trance (?).

PC: Ja – I say: They are coming in more contact with what I call "the whole state" – which is similar to what you say a little bit different.

WG: Well, this reminds me of my first impressions I got from you. And through all these years I experienced you as a person who emphasized and realized in your teaching that "holistic" thinking and experiencing. (PC: Ja.) So, realizing my initial question in this interview, I would resume: the differences or changes you developed are not so much located in what you are doing, but in the more satisfying frame of reference (PC: Hmmh) that you are using, that is relieving you in taking responsibility for certain acts with the person. (PC: Hmmh) I feel as if you would say: I just can trust when we are centering on the actual ongoing moment, and what we can experience, then, we trust and it develops. (PC: Hmmh). Is that right?

PC: Ja

WG: Thank you, Mr. Carter (both laughing)

PC: Now, you asked me about in what I see the change in general, in the terms of hypnotherapy – in how it's changing and what effect it is having in general on psychotherapy and, may be, the population ... I don't know how much I am in touch with that; but, what I see is that over the last twenty years in the United States there have been more and more programs, generally, not just in psychotherapy, that involve hypnosis – or may be more accurately: trance, working with trance state, with the unconscious, or (what I think is the better word is) the metaconscious, the more inclusive awareness as opposed to the limited awareness of conscious mind – and that's in many places, and it's continuing to grow. I think "hypnosis" itself is still like a "mystery kind" of thing, and there is still a lot of people in the world that think it this way. People don't know about Ericksonian hypnosis in the general population. For them hypnosis is still Mesmer, and the stage work, and all these Things ... and I meet a Lot of therapists who don't like to use hypnosis – but: trance and the notion of "the other mind", or the "meta mind", or the notion of the "right brain", and that kind of thing – this is here to stay and is growing in every field. And so that means to me that: That's the more essential thing ... about hypnotherapy, too. You know, hypnotherapy is going to be nice for certain people, both, in terms of a certain therapist to work with, and for certain clients to specifically experience hypnotherapy and the rituals of hypnotherapy – you know: arm levitation, and the age regression, and counting, and things like that.

WG: We name this, to set it up from the more inclusive hypnotherapy, "clinical hypnosis". And we are calling "hypnotherapy" the wider application of Ericksonian principles, (PC: Aha.) for example: Utilizing all of the client's behavior, using the interspersal technique, using metaphors, and the whole variety of indirect and strategic work, in the family therapy, in groups, with couples, in individual work – allowing the person to concentrate on existence in an alternative way, without the explicit induction of hypnotic trance.

PC: Ja – and this is an incredible thing to realize that learning does not only take place when you're very conscious, but, that learning takes place in different states of awareness ... in the state where you're not conscious even ... we don't even know what we're learning. Realizing, that that's possible, that's a fantastic kind of change in our "Umwelt". That's a big change, and it still is happening now in many areas – we're in the middle of it. It's a big change for therapists to consider that they can work in a state other than absolutely having a specific diagnosis, knowing exactly what they are going to do next, and knowing everything consciously – or, pretending to know everything consciously, because you can't know everything. And for therapists, now, to work in a different state is fantastic.

WG: And this is what you are observing in the States and everywhere you come around (PC: more), that people are going to trust more on alternative capabilities, the right hemispheric processing of the brain, and on more integrative modes of working with clients (?).

PC: Ja – to the point, what I mean: Coca Cola would buy it and starts selling trances in different forms, you know, or little trance toys, little aids – or you can learn with tapes while you are sleeping ... To meet the point: It's becoming, it is a business – and, when it is in the economy, I think, it's really becoming a part of the culture – and that's already happening more and more. And it's interesting, you know, from a purist's perspective it's disgusting, but from a perspective of what really effects the whole population: It's a statement – a very strong statement.

Anmerkung: Dieses Interview mit Paul Carter wurde am 5. Juli 1986 in Bad Tölz von Wilhelm Gerl geführt.