

Systemic Voodoo

written by

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NLP is part of our 'individualistic' Western culture. A culture that teaches: 'I can take control over my own life.' But as soon as we focus on social systems, we enter a different world. A world in which greater powers than me are in control. Where the we dominates the me. Where collectivity overpowers individuality; and where the spirit of the nation, the tribe, the family or the ancestors seem to decide over our fate.

In 'family constellation therapy', as it was developed by the German psychotherapist and former priest Bert Hellinger, 'fate' is an central concept. In this article we argue that Hellingers work thanks part of its succes to how it integrates some elements of primordial relegious healing practices. By making these latter aspects more visable, we hope to add something to an ecological application of some of the ingredients of Hellingers work within NLP.

Family constellation therapy

Hellinger and his colleques work with individual clients within (large) groups. After briefly exploring the clients family composition and history, the client is asked to make a spacial representation of his family: Consisting of other groupmembers, that represent life, death, stillborn or even aborted relatives. This living sculpture is called a family constellation. The client is the one who chooses the groupmembers to be used as representatives and he is also the one that by just following his intuition puts them on the right locations. A family constellation is completed when the client also puts a representative for himself in place. After the constellation is ready, the client is aked to sit down and observe everything from third perceptual position.

In Hellingers work the location and orientation of the surrogate family members help to 'diagnose' the problem. This diagnosis may consist of several types of the so called 'systemic entanglements'. And as soon as the therapist has 'read' the family constellation, he starts to make changes in the positions of the stand ins. The therapist may move them in any direction in every sequence. In many cases the therapist motivates the client and the stand-ins, to repeat particular sentences or to take symbolic postures that may go as far as hugging and embracing. These prediscrbed verbal and nonverbal ritual acts are aimed at clarifying disorderly relationships and to counteract systemic entanglements. By way of experimenting with new positions the therapist will often reach at a 'solution': Which consist of an improved family constellation.

In the end the client exchanges places with his own representative in order to experience the solution from within: From first perceptual position. This is where the therapeutic session usually ends.

Magic and the submodality location

The first article about Hellingers work in Anchor point was written by Tim Hallbom and Kris Johnson in august 1997. In Anchor point (Terry You will know this, 1998), NLP-world (march 1997) and in MultiMind (august 1997) we have modelled some fundamental patterns in family constellation therapy. In these articles, it was the important role of the submodality location that was emphasized. Location being the critical submodality in most peoples social experience, is with no doubt the major operator in family constellation therapy. This modelling has resulted in "The Family Panorama", an NLP concept that without Hellingers work would not have been possible.

Our next step is to explore some of the more exotic qualities in Hellingers work. We have come to believe that its therapeutic impact is not fully accounted for by its ability to change a clients family representations. But family constellation therapy is a kind of magic: Magic defined as the combination of effectivity and incomprehensability (Strooykan, 1992).

Apart from therapeutic effectiveness, there is a world of difference between the way in which the average NLP-er changes the submodalities of his clients family and in the way Hellinger carries out this task. Hellingers 'magical' style and method seem to be very appealing and motivating to a great number of people. So our next question is: What other psychological phenomena provide family constellation therapy with so much attraction?

The attraction of strong and strange emotions

In the middle of a family constellation session, while the therapist was directing a stand-in brother to take position near to some dead relatives, his stand-in sister suddely bursted in tears, and shouted out in despair:"They are all going away!"

Where did this sudden emotion, that made everyone shiver, come from? Was it a result of 'over identification' with her role as a sister? Or did she project her own family situation on that of the client? Or was she indeed reacting to information that reached her from the client by means of unknown and mysterious channels?

Anyway, Hellingers therapy has a strong emotional impact on people. Not only the client, but also the representatives and the audience experience strong feelings. These emotions often come by surprise and are used to effectively guide the therapists work. This, together with their incomprehensable nature creates magic.

In family constellation therapy one does regard the emotions of the representatives as 'not belonging to them but to other people'-to the original family members. So the 'official' view is that they belong to the family system of the client, and that inside a family constellation they come to expression by means of the stand-ins. A representative is seen as a sort of an emotional antennae. No explicit explanations are provided for how 'the system-soul' transmits these emotional data to the 'representative-soul'; so one has to put questions about this aside or believe that parapsychological or supernatural phenomena are at work, like telepathy or morphogenetic fields and the like. Here we find magic again: Incomprehensability combined with effectiveness.

Other sorts of emotions are experienced when a session comes to its conclusion. Then Hellinger leads rerepresentatives and clients alike to repeat 'ritualistic' sentences. These verbalizations are a kind of formalized social interactions on a metacommunicative level.

They are aimed at clarifying and reorganizing the disturbed relationships involved: To turn disorder into order. For instance, a child that has taken on the position of an adult, and did carry parent-like responsibilities, is returned into a child role by saying: 'I am only the child, you are the big ones. You can take care of it yourself, it is none of my business'.

Reconciliation and showing respect may be the direct meaning of many of these ritual interactions. In this concluding stage of family constellation therapy, people may experience very powerful healing emotions, that arise from things like regaining contact with lost sons, or from embracing (the representatives of) forsaken still born babies, or from mourning about uncles that were not mourned about enough. At other times a client is bending down for forgotten relatives who died in a concentration camp by saying: 'I honour your fate. I will live for you.' This of course, may raise strong emotions in almost anyone.

Part of these emotions are triggered by the staged human drama; such scenes will also raise strong sentiments in a theatre or a movie. Hellingers method elicits strong primary social emotions and the issues that are worked at always deal with the very basics of the human condition: life, death, separation and love.

Political and religious leaders all over the globe know that collectively felt emotions create strong bonding. Emotionality experienced in groups is something many people do value as a quality in itself. For instance, collective mourning is appreciated in most cultures, as is euphoria in groups: it is called party! The socio-emotional quality found in family constellation therapy has a similar attraction as encounter groups, sensitivity trainings and all kinds of religious cults. And part of its attractiveness must be attributed to this quality of raising collective emotionality.

And besides these social aspects; many people still regard negative emotion as a proof of the effectiveness of therapy. Although NLP has put this under debate for years, it is still a popular view, that the strong expression of painful emotions means good therapy.

Most NLP-ers believe that disphoric emotions show where resources are needed. And that intense negative emotions do motivate clients to do much work to gain better feelings; a tendency that adds a strong placebo effect to psychotherapy. But still, there is little reason to believe that the intensity and amount of emotional discharge as such, do correlate with therapeutic effectiveness. Otherwise we must consider war and disaster to be the best forms of therapy!

But the expression of love probably does have a healing power of itself. And it is this emotion of love we see often at work within family constellation therapy.

Magic, pragmatism, self determination and fate

Before we return to family constellation therapy we will first explore an 'every-day-Dutch-exotic' example of magic. It stems from the Winti (Voodoo like) religion that is practiced widely in the Netherlands among people from Surinamse origin.

When a Surinamese man has an extramarital affair, and this comes to surface, he or other family members may consult a lukuman: A Winti divinator. This lukuman may throw an oracle to see what evil spirit is possessing the man that caused him to be untrue. Most often, this is said to be the spirit of the woman with whom this man had the affair.

Next, the man will be brought to a bonuman, a priest. This priest will execute some rituals geared towards exorcising this evil (Kroi) spirit. As soon as this is done, the man is free again. He will rejoin his family, and all will celebrate his liberation from evil. And after that, no hard feelings of any kind will disturb the marriage; because the man was defined as the innocent victim of an overpowering spirit.

Now if you compare this approach to that of a family constellation therapist, you will notice a striking resemblance in structure. The family constellation therapist may claim that adultery results from 'systemic entanglement'. This means that unconscious identifications with (dead) relatives may cause one to seek other lovers. And by clarifying this systemic entanglement with the aid of a family constellation ritual, this problem can be solved.

In this case 'systemic entanglement' comes very close to 'possession' and the psychological processes involved may be of a similar nature. But instead of an evil foreign spirit as in the Winti, in family constellation therapy the client is regarded to be infested by a relative. But again the client is only a victim. 'Moralists' will criticize both approaches because they take away responsibility from people. Here pragmatism is confronted by idealism.

The modeling of magic

In 1973 David Akstein, a Brazilian psychiatrist, published an article entitled 'Terpichore Trance Therapy, a new Hypnopsychotherapeutic Method'. Akstein had studied religious and spiritistic cults in Brazil, and extracted a new therapeutic method from their rituals, in which trance dancing was the central activity.

From the early eighties on, Jaap Hollander had several inspiring encounters with David Akstein. Inspiration that finally resulted in an NLP-modelling project called Pragmagics: a name for the transcultural modeling of exotic 'magical' healing practices. (See NLP World november 1996.) Akstein had shown us the way when he explored patterns in the Umbanda rituals, that could be transferred to a more regular-western therapy setting.

Trance that results from prolonged rhythmic dancing is applied as healing method in almost all cultures except our own. But when we use it with our Western clients it proves to be as effective as it is in Africa, Bali, Haiti or Brazil. It was only abolished by psychotherapists because it seemed to be a pagan non-Christian, non-rational method.

In our pragmatic project the central question is: Can Western psychotherapy and in particular NLP, be enriched with other functional 'magical' elements?

In NLP's history this issue was not entirely new, several NLP-ers demonstrated their interest in shamanism. The earliest example thereof was Virginia Satir, who happened to be an initiated native American shaman: 'Flying Eagle Woman.'

But this time we will work the other way around. We will explore a Western method -Family constellation therapy- and explore it for primordial magic and religious elements.

The family oracle

The primary magical element in Hellingers work is his 'oracle', as provided by the family constellations. The client puts the representatives of his family members on the floor, in a pattern according to his inner representation of the family ties. As soon as he is ready, the therapist 'reads' this pattern of people. And just like a priest who reads an oracle of bones,

stones or shells, he is the one who makes the interpretation. The therapist only explains part of the meaning of the constellation to the client. He may point out, as it were, the 'family spirits' that are responsible for the problems.

It is important to take note of the fact, that oracles are the most popular form of psychotherapy in the world. In many cultures an oracle is the first thing to consult in times of trouble. In Brazil, for instance, where one of us (Hollander) studied the rituals of Candomble, people who suffer from problems, will first see a priestess (Mae de Santos) who will usually throw the oracle of the Buzios for them. This consists of a number of large cauri shells which are cast in a basket. This oracle has an African and -more distantly- maybe even Chinese origin, and came to Brazil -like the rest of Candomble- with the slaves. From the shell constellation the priestess then reads which God or which spirit is angry and what sacrifices should be made to appease him or her.

Two points are of interest in relationship to family constellation therapy. First of all, the problem that is presented by the 'client' will often be related to the family system -an unfaithful husband, an unruly child, a sick parent, a single but pregnant daughter, a son who sells drugs, et cetera -and the priestess will often know- by living in the same neighbourhood and having heard intimate stories from other locals -many details about that very family system. Secondly, the rituals used to appease the Gods often involve the whole family and part of the neighbourhood. And even the character of the spirit that haunts the client may be quite systemic in nature. It may be a child that died and that doesn't want to leave. Or an aging neighbor to whom the client has been unkind.

More or less magical oracles

One of us (Derks) was corresponding with a Malawian herbalist and witchdoctor from Mulanje. We wrote each other letters in which we explained our treatment methods. On 24th february 1992 doktor Kavalo wrote me:

"For instance, when a client comes, I make him at ease and relaxed as you do. Then I ask him his problem physically, or consult my oracle as he wishes. My oracle is nothing other than a bottle filled with charmed stones. Thus I start mentioning each and every disease at a particular time, at the same time shaking it. When the sound from the bottle still continues then that is not the appropriate disease the client is suffering from, and vice versa. Then I take another bottle of the same sort in order to prove if both bottles reach an equilibrium. Before I give the right treatment, I once again consult my oracle to know if at all I can cure that disease. Then I give instructions on how to use the herb, otherwise it can be lethal. For most diseases the standard dose is 3 times a day. The entire operation takes about 15 minutes. After being cured the client comes again for a ceremony to honour the burying of the used-up herb. If not cured than I advice him to visit the hospital. This is the short summary of the treatment procedure."

An oracle has several components to it. The first one consist of a 'higher power' that governs it. This can be any God, spirit or supernatural force. In the shell oracle mentioned above, it is a specific candomble deity who 'makes' the shells fall in a certain constellation, thereby signalling messages. In Kavalo's case it is the magical wisdom of the charmed stones. Kavalo was gifted to be a witchdoctor: It was his fathers spirit who came to give it to him in a dream.

In Hellingers case the higher power is 'The Soul'. All biological wisdom that govern the laws of family ties seem to speak to Hellingers by way of the soul.

An other component of an oracle is its interpretation. Some oracles are easy to interpret, and do not involve much activity from the divinator. The I-ching comes with a book of interpretations and the original West African Ifa-oracles priests knew thousands of verses of interpretational poetry. In other cases the priest must make contact to 'highers powers' to know what the oracle means. Kavalo, just like many kinesiologist who apply a muscle test, uses series of yes or no checks. To a hypnotist these are 'ideo motor signals' from the unconscious mind of both client and therapist.

In Hellingers case he has to be in good contact with his soul to see what is up. Visual accessing cues suggest that the soul shows Hellinger images to help him to interpret a family constellation.

Beside these two factors, oracles differ in their 'patient-luck' ratio. Throwing shells is pure a matter of luck and not influenced directly by the patient or the divinator. Chance governs both the I Ching and the Tarot -in these types of oracles the priest may upgrade its authority by the use of various incomprehensible explanations or may include irrational magical acts. Like having the client blow on the cards; or having a trained bird pick out the cards.

Deciphering hand-lines, urine, the iris or other body structures, may involve much more rational relationship with the patient. In the case of family constellations, the Social Panorama theory (NLP World november 1995), that states that the submodality location is critical in most social representations, provides a rational explanation for the validity of this 'oracle'. But only few people are familiar with this view; and it came long after Hellinger became popular. In the same way we can imagine that blood samples, as taken by a medical doctor, may seem a very powerful oracle to a Bushman who has no idea how anyone can 'read' scientific facts like the amount of white cells from this red liquid. For a naive bystander it must be a sheer miracle that a doctor can see this way that a patient is infested with the malaria spirit?

The oracular character of family constellations molds the client-therapist relationship; which in many instances is similar to the interaction between a divinator and his client. In such relationship one cannot argue about what the oracle means, because its wisdom comes from higher sources. So in family constellation therapy there is no room for interpretative quarrel, not for counter expertise, and certainly no place for 'client knows best' like is common in NLP.

What all divinators share, is good calibration skills; they search for nonverbal cues that enable them to guess right. And most divinators try to 'score' good interpretations and predictions. To raise credibility the client has to (publicly) admit that the interpretations are true. A family constellation therapist may observe a constellation and guess what dramatic events must have taken place in the past: 'Was there another child?', 'Did your father have an affair or was there some other problem in your parents marriage?'

Many of our NLP-colleagues consider this the most dangerous side of family constellation therapy: Where the danger will come from negative beliefs installed with authority. But ofcourse when interpretations are 'strikingly' right, this has a very high level of attraction and placebo effect.

Part of the healing power of 'oracle therapy' lays outside the 'cure' but in the placebo effect of a compact diagnosis. A compact diagnosis simplifies the complexity of the problem. When a person has a complex problem, a divinator who reads an oracle, will add information to the clients view of that problem. However, when this information is presented with the appropriate amount of authority, it will immediately dominate the clients picture of his problem. The client cannot escape from including this compact diagnosis into his problem space, and often it will enrich it similar to the way a metaphor would do. There after the problem is seen different, and other resources will be found. Problems that were never associated with family matters will be seen to be caused by them, from the moment on a family constellation therapist has concluded from his oracle that this is the case.

Spooky diagnosis

Let us compare two diagnoses. The first one comes from doctor Kavalo. He may diagnose that his patient is bewitched and is in the need of 'body and house protection against night disturbances'. And he explains: 'This can be caused by people who after experiencing something terrible became wishes that threaten a persons sleep and peace of mind.' And henceforth Kavalo describes his treatment: 'In that case herbs will be directly endorsed into the blood by cutting three lines with a sharp razor on each and every spot, say 14 in number on the body until blood ooze. It happens that when a witch approaches you, he cannot see you, so you are safe.' (Kavalo, 26 september 1992)

Hellinger may diagnose a 'systemic entanglement'. For instance it may be that the client was identified with an uncle that was a victim of war crime long before the clients birth. The clients parents were probably the ones who actually identified their child with this dead uncle; but thereafter the client carried this uncle and his fate in his 'soul'; the latter causing the symptoms.

Kavalo's and Hellingers diagnoses both talk of traumatised persons that inflict problems to the client. A deeper level of modeling may reveal that both oracles can in fact diagnose the same thing. To be more specific, in both diagnoses it are the repressed (dissociated) representations of significant others that disturb the clients.

This type of spooky diagnosis are as fascinating as the 'past live traumata' of reincarnation therapy; and the client feels just as little in control with them. But they may have a similar kind of positive therapeutic effect.

Attracted by ancestor worship

Seen from the pragmagical perspective, Hellingers 'family constellation therapy' is a Western version of 'ancestor worship'.

What is ancestor worship and what has been its role in the religions of man? One thing we can say about this, is that it has been around for a very long time and in a surprisingly large number of different cultures. Somehow the idea that an aspect of dead family members remains, and communicates with the living, seems to be useful to man. In pragmatics, we believe in transtemporal and transcultural validation. In other words: We assume that a certain belief system or a certain psychosocial procedure -and commonly we find the one in combination with the other- has value for people in general, when it survives many different

time periods and when it spreads itself through many different cultures. In other words: Psychosocial systems demonstrate their 'fit' to man in general by their survival capability. In a sense, the popularity of family constellation therapy supports the idea that ancestor worship is by en large a usefull human activity, that has a good 'fit'.

In the Surinamese Winti religion ancestor spirits are believed to sometimes cause trouble for the living. Often it seem to be the forgotten grand parents or expelled uncles or aborted aunts that hount the client, and not so mutch his next of kin: Reconciliation and honouring them will help to break the spell. Ritual meals of their favorite food combined with songs and incantations do turn them into allies.

The most extensive practice of ancestor worship is found in Africa, where ancestral spirits are commonly an important part of the total patheon of supernatural beings. In fact, in Africa many deities are ancestors who have distinguished themselves when living. Although we know this tradition even in Europe, where Gods like Wodan were originally kings in reality. In the aboriginal kingdoms of Africa, ancestral spirits of kings and high chiefs often were believed to have power over matters such as rain and the growth of crops, whereas spirits of heads of families, lineages and clans, influenced matters of immediate concern to the particular social groups. The spirits were generally regarded as very helpful to their living descendants and were worshipped in cyclic ceremonies as well as at times of crisis when help was needed. In family constellation therapy we see that receiving the support from dead ancestors a commonly used and apriciated intervention.

In family constellation therapy the spirits of ancestors become represented by living people, who as it where play their role. Honouring and reconciling anscestor spirits and the spirits of forsaken family members can be said to be a major part of this therapy too.

The power of representational magic

Hellinger acts as if the people in the family constellation are the actual family members of the client. In many instances he seems to neglect the fact that they are only a bunch of representatives.

This in itself can be regarded to constitute a magical ritual. It is called 'representational magic'. It is paralleled by all kinds of shamanistic and Voodoo practices where a symbolic representation (in the shape of a puppet, a fetish, a sand drawing or a chicken) is changed, transformed or distroyed in order to cure or harm the actual real thing. Best nown is the puppet that is pinned, to hurt the person that is represented by it. This latter (wisi) procedure is also known by the Surinamese Winti priests: It is black magic.

But Hellinger applies only 'white magic' when he acts as if by changing the family constellation, he is curing the real family. But he himself makes clear in his writings, that he is fully aware of the fact that he is only changing the family representation in the mind of the client, and not the real thing. But this often will stay unclear in his presentation. By diffusing the real family with its symbol, many magical ideas are triggered in clients and workshop participants.

Stories that highlight the dramatic effect that a change in a family constellation had on 'real' family members are favored by people that deal with family constellation therapy. "After the

constellation, the woman came home, and five minutes later the phone rang. It was her mother. They had not been in contact for over forty years!

Such stories enhance the power of the magic by at the same time undermining the 'normal' frame of reference of the audience. Telling tales of incomprehensible successes is common practice among magical healers and their admirers all over the world.

Attracted by spirit possession

When I (Derks) stood as a stand-in in a family constellation myself, I represented a person who had committed suicide. The same moment the therapist asked the client 'how' this family member (=me) took his life, I felt a rope around my neck. In the next second the client answered: "He hung himself."

Another magical pattern that is obviously at work in 'family constellation therapy' is spirit possession. The stand-ins in a family constellation temporarily 'become' the family member they represent. And many report they do experience feelings and insights they do not consider to be part of their 'regular selves'. These 'foreign' feelings and visions are considered to belong to the 'soul of the system'.

Pragmatics showed us the astonishing strength of the identification processes that seem to belong to spirit possession. People's social operating system is probably the most developed part of their unconscious mind. A part that may identify (go in 2nd position) with anything in a very sensitive and creative manner.

By experimenting with possession trance phenomena in our pragmatic workshops it became apparent that what happens within shamanistic cults, show a great similarity to what people can experience in a family constellation.

A Candomble medium that is possessed by a spirit does also feel emotions and have insights that are not regarded as being part of the self. But these emotions and insights are believed to be given in by the spirit possessing him or her.

The only motive to practice possession-trance for a shaman, is found in the fact that this contextualizes supra human abilities. During the possession the shaman can do things and can know things that are not considered to be part of the capabilities of ordinary people: like clairvoyance or spiritual healing. One could claim, that a stand-in in a family constellation has only access to his sensitivity to other people's family soul in the limited context of the constellation. And it is also considered inappropriate when a stand-in mother goes on mothering the client outside the contextual boundaries of the constellation.

In family constellation therapy one does not see the ecstatic dancing that are used to access possession trance in Voodoo-like cults. But a representative will experience many moments of less obvious 'relaxed' trance states: What else can one do, when you stand there with the assignment to sense one's feelings? Besides that, role-play of any kind seems to need a trance-state, whether it is in the theatre, the training, a business meeting, a public presentation or a mediumistic channelling activity within an occult spiritistic science.

Attracted by an other reality

A common ingredient in any religious cult consists of a leader with superior knowledge of 'other realities'. In most shamanistic cults it is the priest who knows the laws of the spirits. In family constellation therapy it is the therapist who knows the 'laws of love': The rules that govern family ties and systemic entanglements.

In my (Hollander) private practice, a woman with cancer spontaneously revealed that she had decided at very early age to follow her mother who died from cancer into death. Hellinger proclaims this to be a common pattern in children that follows the laws of love. Children may as well sacrifice their own life, driven by their childish magical thinking. They may believe that they can die instead of their beloved parents and save them by doing that.

The existence of this type of 'other reality' is very hard to prove, since it is said to function unconscious. But its spontaneous surfacing, like in the example above, suggests that it is not only a fantasy.

The universal power of this irrational childish magical thinking may be illustrated by the popularity of Christianity: How can one save all souls by sacrificing oneself on the cross? Christ practised Hellinger's childish magical pattern: 'Rather I die than you...'

The laws of love, as Hellinger presents them are complex and simple at the same time: Their linguistic patterns can be compared in some way to Castaneda's lessons of Don Juan. These patterns can be summarized as: Things are always the opposite of what you think they are. In Hellinger's work the weak ones are the strong ones: The offenders are the victims: The dead are the most alive.

It is justified to say that Castaneda opened up an entire new popular philosophy: 'The ways of the warrior' helped a generation that Christianity and Western philosophy could not serve; it also inspired the founders of NLP.

We believe that Hellinger really does know many of the laws of love. Studying his philosophy may help to balance out some of the egocentric and individualistic world views that dominate our time; when you have had to muck up Anthony Robbins, refresh your soul with a volume of Hellinger's work.

The passive role of the client

I (Hollander) witnessed a healing ritual in Bulgaria, in which a child was cured of its fears. The healer used a 'lead ritual'. Lead was melted and dropped into a bucket of cold water, causing it instantaneously to solidify. The shape of the lead was 'read' by the shaman. By the way, in modern Finland such a ritual is widely used as a New Year's good luck charm ceremony. But in Bulgaria, the most remarkable thing was the absence of the client. The mother of the child consulted the healer on her own, only bringing a piece of clothing of the child.

The passive role of the client in family constellation therapy, has its parallel in many magical healing practices. In some cases, like in the one above, the 'patient' does not even have to be present. The priest works on the problem without any input from the side of the patient. However, in many shamanistic rituals the client will become very active after the session. In our own pragmatic workshops participants report lots of searching activity (placebo effect) after they get home. The ritual functions as a strong impulse to motivate the client to do his homework.

Within the timeframe of a family constellation therapy session the client sees alternative family images. And the client will also witness rituals of reconciliation and peace making between the stand ins for his kinsfolk. Then the activity curve of the client seems to rise sharply after the session, to continue to be high for a considerable time.

The role of collective spirituality

Family constellation therapy does hold the implicit suggestion that everyone is connected to a force of higher order. This can be called 'the tribal soul' or 'the family spirit' or 'a morphogenetic field' or 'human nature at large' or 'God'.

The magical patterns as we have analysed them above may open up any kind of religious thinking. The philosophical inclination of the therapist may fully fill this spiritual void. And collective spiritual experiences will easily pop up, in family constellation therapy.

The human need for collective spirituality is one of the strongest social forces in the universe. Hellinger who himself is an ex priest, seems to be able to handle unwanted religiosity around his work; but can his followers and imitators do this as adequate?

Conclusion

We wrote this article to give credit to Hellingers work, and especially for how he integrated many magical patterns that make psychotherapy effective. Hellingers deep understanding of this quality has forwarded his method to a very high standard.

Besides that it is good to remember that a similar pragmatic analysis can be made of any type of healing practice; academic psychiatry, traditional medicine, hypnotherapy, kinesiology, natural healing, faith healing and NLP alike. Since every (successful) healer must make use of principles that are similar to those used by witchdoctors and shamans. No one ever made this point clearer than Edwin Fuller Torrey in his excellent book 'Witchdoctors and Psychiatrists' (1972).

Beside the modeling of the use of the submodality location, understanding the rules of family systems as Hellinger does will give way for an important contribution to the field of NLP, probably reaching beyond the level of the Family Panorama -as this was mentioned at the beginning of this article.

But family constellation therapy is as free as NLP. Where all magical traditions regulate their practice by systems of apprenticeship and initiation, family constellation therapists have just started to organize themselves. But in contrast with NLP, family constellation therapy is not presented as a technology you can learn, but something practised by people who are in good contact with their souls.

And this basic structure, which in essence says: I have access to powerful forces that are invisible to you, and therefore you must do X or you will suffer Y, makes wonderful ground for all kinds of abuses. The fact that an entity is called 'The Soul' rather than 'Oxala' does not make the opportunities for misconduct any less.

To NLP-ers the combination of all methods that work is the core of our business. We have been pragmatical eclectics for over twenty years. So what we should seek for is the ecological application of Hellingers lessons. How can we make it to match the NLP presuppositions? How can we involve the resources of the client? How can we eliminate all

noice stemming from the stand-ins? And strip it from its authorative traits to reach at procedures of a clarity as for instance 'Core Transformations'?