For this issue of the Journal, we have a small, yet powerful, collection of books with one common thread: The legacy of Milton Erickson. Harriet Hollander leads with a review of The Legacy of Milton H. Erickson: Selected Papers of Stephen Gilligan. As one of Erickson’s chosen students, Gilligan chronicles the influence of Erickson’s approach on his own odyssey as a therapist, as well as positing his own unique neo-Ericksonian concept of the “relational self” and of self-relations therapy.

The first few chapters provide an excellent introduction and review of hypnotic skills such as induction, ways to form a secure hypnotherapeutic relationship, and the principle of utilization. Subsequent chapters reveal his own way of helping clients form “generative autonomy.” Dr. Hollander notes that there are several papers which have not been published elsewhere, including one on Ericksonian therapy with incest survivor groups and another on the use of therapeutic rituals to change relationships to memories. Our reviewer pronounces this a challenging and enjoyable selection, especially for therapists who work with clients who are cut off from an authentic sense of self by trauma and depression.

The second selection is a similar collection of papers by another renowned Ericksonian practitioner, Stephen Lankton, who has presented frequently at ASCH annual meetings. Assembling Ericksonian Therapy: The Collected Papers of Stephen Lankton is evaluated by Norma Barretta. She underlines Lankton’s emphasis on improving current functioning, on the positive qualities the client seeks in a therapist, and his reminders of the importance of observation in order to create therapeutic experiences that can foster change. Her one critique is the failure to credit John Grinder and Richard Bandler for their broadening of Erickson’s work in their creation of Neurolinguistic Programming.

Despite this minor flaw, our reviewer heartily recommends Lankton’s book as a worthy Ericksonian reference for the student’s or practitioner’s bookshelf.

The last book of this collection is written by a colleague in the ASCH community who participates actively in teaching as well as in the New York component society. Jane Parsons-Fine’s book Loving in the Here and Now is critiqued by Jordan Zarren, who finds the book hard to put down and highly recommends this work as a “must have.”

The author teaches the reader how to apply the tool of hypnosis to a troubled relationship. Topics of interest include how to deal with negative self-beliefs and anger, and how money and sexual issues can be resolved using communication that elicits a more positive trance for learning. Zarren praises the writing style and practical exercises,
while observing that some of these might not be appropriate for the helpless and depressed client, because they require active initiation. These particular exercises can be easily modified, however, and the reviewer gives the book his highest rating.

I hope you will enjoy browsing through the reviews and ultimately perhaps through the pages of the books themselves. This will be my last edition of the journal as Book Editor, though I will return with own reviews from time to time. I have enjoyed greatly the opportunity to choose a variety of resources intended to widen the window of consideration for you as readers. In the interim, please continue to send your recommendations for review to Dr. Thurman Mott, Editor of the AJCH: ajch@adelphia.net.

I want to thank all the reviewers who have given so generously of their time and their opinions, and most of all, to you, the readers who inspire all of us to reach further and deeper for titles worthy of your attention.


Milton H. Erickson made a lifelong impression on the physicians, psychiatrists, dentists, psychologists, and social workers who attended his lectures and workshops. However, only a few of those who came to learn were granted entry to his clinical practice as observers and students. Stephen Gilligan was one of the chosen. In this book, he describes Erickson’s approach to patients, as seen through the lens of his personal experiences with him.

Each paper has been previously presented at a workshop, printed in proceedings, or in an edited volume and provides a brief exposition of Gilligan’s concepts. Collectively, they represent his personal odyssey as therapist. The book begins with “Ericksonian Approaches to Clinical Hypnosis,” an excellent introduction to hypnotic induction and the principle of utilization.

In this first chapter, Gilligan describes a mindset that helps the therapist apprehend the client’s reality as Erickson did, and respectful ways to pace and lead that reality. The therapist develops what he designates as an externally oriented trance to establish a deep, accepting rapport with the client. The therapist’s trance—focused on the subject, but also incorporating internal prompts—creates a secure relationship that allows the therapist to elicit unconscious responses and minimize resistance due to fear that psychological safety will be compromised in hypnosis.

Subsequent chapters provide a window into the way Gilligan began to integrate what he learned from Erickson with his own concepts of the role of hypnosis. Although many clinicians will disagree with him, he dismisses the DSM as a compilation of self-devaluing terms; his point is that treatment consists of changing self-devaluing views, or what he calls self-devaluing trances into self-valuing solutions.

In “Symptom Phenomena as Trance Phenomena” he makes a powerful argument for helping the client to broaden negative views of self and life situation through the use of trance. Trance permits multiple and opposite views to be held simultaneously, thereby facilitating mental shifts and transformation of rigid and stuck positions. The therapist particularly makes note of the client’s symptom trances involving “both/and”
logic (I don’t want to smoke but I smoke) and the client’s use of paradoxical injunctions (I want to get well but I don’t want to change). The unique contribution here is Gilligan’s emphasis on the relationship the therapist establishes with the client. The therapist enters the client’s trance without violating the client’s boundaries, to repattern devaluing trances (i.e., symptoms) and change them to self-valuing experiences.

The nucleus of Gilligan’s unique formulation of the therapeutic process is contained in an early paper, “Generative Autonomy.” It is not an easy read; others—“Primary Process in Brief Therapy;” and “Fight Against Fundamentalism”—are more accessible. They give a view of the diverse sources that have informed his view of the self, the relational field of self and the nature of therapy. He often cites T. S. Eliot regarding the human condition; Gary Zukav about the nature of the universe; Gregory Bateson’s analysis of the double bind and complementarity; Jung’s theories of archetypes; and Buddhists’ concepts of self, relative to the larger universe.

In his conceptual formulation, experience is generated through the marking out of distinctions—of figure and ground. The most important of these is the distinction of “self,” part of a larger context, a relational field. Distinctions to protect the self, can lead to integration or growth, or become self-defeating and dissociative. Frozen in self-defeating patterns, unable to use conscious reasoning to resolve inner conflict, a person goes into a hypnotic state which lends itself to “both/and” processes—the simultaneous consideration of figure and ground or the capacity to accept the difficulty of a problem while standing outside it. The therapist softens the process of making distinctions; accessing his/her own unconscious while becoming absorbed in the client’s patterns; and yet remaining apart from them. Emphasis is given to “sensing the self,” and visualizing a desired, symptom free, autonomous future, as a way of stepping outside habitual, limiting, self-defeating patterns. In the context of hypnotherapy, it is neither the hypnotic experience of the client nor the therapeutic relationship that restores generativity and autonomy but “both/and.”

The author marks his distinction from Erickson, his teacher and mentor, in a section called the “Post Ericksonian World.” Here, Gilligan’s newer concepts are crystallized and, though historically related to Erickson, carry a highly original stamp. The new perspective focuses on the “relational self.” In “Post Ericksonian World” he undertakes a reformulation of the idea of the unconscious, a term too limited for “therapeutic flexibility” and connoting something apart from or outside of the client’s known experience. He prefers to frame the dynamics of unconscious functioning as a search for the “center,” as defined in the performance of aikido—a felt sense of intelligence that permits relational creativity and calmness.

In “Expanding Love Beyond Desire,” Gilligan further describes his self-relations approach to therapy. A central concept is that “pathology is study of loneliness.” When a break occurs between the self and the relation field occurs, symptoms develop. Violence achieves that effect.

The therapist’s part is to engage in the practice of mindfulness, the ability to listen and be with experience as it is, and at the same time, provide an experience of mindfulness for the client. Mindfulness leads to restoration, allowing the client to re-establish the self as belonging to a larger field of consciousness—part of something beyond the self that “plays through the field of the self,” in which the “tension of opposites” can be held. To illustrate, Gilligan gives the example of being absorbed in
art, music and dancing, which can evoke “an expanded feeling of self beyond the boundaries of skin and either/or ideology, while maintaining a center—the experience of self as relational field.

This review cannot adequately paraphrase the author’s often unique language which is clarified in the book by clinical examples and quick humorous asides. They include an interesting paper on Ericksonian hypnotherapy with incest-survivor groups and another on therapeutic rituals to change relationships to memories. The latter paper provides a case example and is a particularly powerful piece of writing, since it was motivated by personal experience—the author’s effort to come to terms with the death of his father.

Therapists who are attuned to experiences of clients cut-off from sense of self by trauma and depression will find it worthwhile to pursue this volume. Beyond the specifics of any one paper, the work is infused with a sense of Gilligan’s personal commitment to the integrity of the therapeutic relationship as a way to allow the client, in cooperation with the therapist, to experience a perspective apart from self, yet connected to a calming center within the self.


During a weeklong residential workshop in Ann Arbor, Michigan, circa 1976, John Grinder gave to Stephen Lankton and me a task to be completed as part of the NLP training in which Lankton and I were participating.

For me it was a most meaningful experience: the very first double induction of my hypnotic work career. It obviously affected all of us to a significant degree. The subject accomplished her outcome, I incorporated the double induction pattern into my work with my husband Philip as my co-hypnotist, and Stephen Lankton has his first volume of Collected Papers—all because of that phenomenal physician in Phoenix.

Through the years I’ve watched Stephen Lankton progress in his personal and professional life, yet I had no idea how remarkably articulate he is in his writing—until now. I accepted Dr. Phillips’ request to review this book with the presupposition that it would be a “piece of cake,” an easy read and complete in less than a week.

Wrong!

This is a collection of articles about very useful and important subjects, and I find myself rereading whole paragraphs in fascination with the multiple meanings available from each read. Multiple embedded metaphors meticulously manipulating minds—in the best possible sense.

Clearly, Lankton has not merely collected and reprinted these works. He has reworked and updated some of them, and arranged them in a way to help us appreciate even more clearly the impact of Erickson’s legacy. The focal point of this book is—of course—the work of Milton Erickson and his influence on the use of hypnosis as an adjunct to medical and psychological intervention.

Lankton reminds us: “Traditional therapy is based on the assumption of an
objective reality that is independent of our efforts to observe it” (p.4).

And yet, the ability to observe is basic to Erickson’s work and to doing good brief therapy. What Lankton presents in these chapters is a model of therapy—in a sense representing what Erickson “resisted”—“attempting to set forth an explicit theory”—because “a rigid adherence to theory often becomes a Procrustean bed that cuts the legs off clients in order to make them fit” (p.5).

And yet Lankton does suggest this as a theory of human development which “assumes people are in a continuous cycle of learning experiences with ever increasing complexity.” (p.6)

Further, he states:

Therapy is based on observable behavior and related to the present and future circumstances of the client. While people have memories, perceptions, and feelings regarding their past, preoccupation with the past to the exclusion of present and future will unnecessarily prolong and complicate the process of therapy. The hallmark of an Ericksonian approach is an emphasis on current interpersonal relationships and their influence on the development and resolution of problems. Individuals may have developed a symptomatic behavior in the distant past, but the Ericksonian view focuses on how the problem is maintained in the present. Efforts are concentrated on increasing new arrangements of learning that can be applied to solving problems in the client’s present life (p.7).

That is elegant!

In his article on “Using Hypnosis in Brief Therapy,” he describes scientific study and clinical application of hypnosis as a “tree with two branches” that continue to grow apart despite many efforts to integrate them.

How right he is.

In “Just Do Good Therapy” (p.135) he mentions qualities the client desires in a therapist: “…an enchanting therapist who stimulates pleasant mental excitement… who is relevant to my reality… who will not label me… with humanity and humor” (p.149).

Don’t we all hope to have these qualities and to be seen this way by the people to whom we deliver our service?

The articles on metaphor are a joy to read with helpful suggestions on construction and use of metaphor in therapy. Lankton also adds some sage advice:

Intellectual knowledge is of very little use; knowledge rooted in sensory observation invariably proves to be the most useful kind for therapeutic metaphors. The most simple observation of nature, human or otherwise, often provides the foundation for a teaching story. In order to tell such a story, however, the therapist must have used his or her skills of observation. It is such a simple but important point: If you don’t notice anything, you don’t have anything to say about it (p.123).

Obviously I enjoyed reading this book (and thus rereading several of the articles). I do wish, however, that despite the fact that Lankton had years ago completely dissociated himself from his prior involvement in the Neuro-Linguistic Programming
model, he had given some credit to the work of John Grinder and Richard Bandler in their exploration of Erickson’s model. I understand his reluctance to be associated with NLP because of the bastardization of that model and the unrealistic claims made by some NLP “practitioners,” but much of what I read in these articles is quite directly related to the NLP model. It would have been a most gracious gesture to acknowledge Grinder in more than one place (p.155) especially for his excellent work on the linguistic patterns he extracted from Erickson’s work.

I shall recommend this book to my students as a fine reference in their own exploration in how to “just do good therapy.” I recommend it to our readers for the same reason.


Jane Parsons-Fein has written an extraordinary book to help individuals and couples recreate their relationships and bring love back into their lives. It is written for couples who are considering a break-up or divorce because they have grown apart and have lost the special feelings of love that brought them together.

The book introduces the reader to the special power of the tool of hypnosis and how to apply it, step by step, individually or as a couple, to bring back the magic of loving and caring. The author explains the process of imprinting negative behaviors and feelings by repetition, which then produce a trance state that becomes the new negative way of coping. The book explains family behavior that is trance-like, and how to get rid of the ghosts of the past that can contribute to misreading what partners are really saying.

Additional chapters deal with negative self-beliefs, anger, and how money and sexual difficulties exacerbate existing problems. It offers ways of creating a more loving, secure future and how to achieve and reach those goals. At the end of each chapter there are suggested practice exercises to help the reader learn and become skilled in the change process. Throughout, the author makes reference to negative trance experiences and how to develop positive trance states to grow and change. The last chapter guides the reader beautifully through the stages of first falling in love and culminates in how to really be in love.

Ms. Parsons-Fein does not attempt to teach the reader as one might do with a workshop or through instruction. She has used integrated case examples illustrating how her approach has changed the real lives of couples throughout the book. The cases are so smoothly integrated into the learning process that the reader can be caught up in identifying with the personal examples described as if they were the readers’ own experiences. They are so real and vividly described that it is almost as if Ms. Fein, the clinician, was reading the mind of the reader.

The flow of words is poetic. The reader easily enters a therapeutic trance with eyes open and full concentration on the words printed on each page. This facilitates a powerful way of learning through enjoyment and satisfaction. I have rarely encountered the feeling of not wanting to put down a non-fiction book, but I did so while reading this book. The reader is instructed to read and practice the exercises one chapter at a
time and not to skip around. This adds to the progressive appreciation of learning how to change and grow one step at a time and allows the reader to absorb the meaning and substance of each chapter.

As was stated, this book was written for the general public. However, those of us who work with dysfunctional communication and relationships can benefit from studying the author’s unique and loving style of doing therapy. The book sits on my desk as a frequent reference and is one that I suggest my clients purchase to enhance my own way of helping them.

Some of the learning exercises that are offered at the end of each chapter may not be appropriate for the significantly depressed or helpless reader because they require such active responses as the purchase of specific objects as tools to help couples struggle through the change process. Even with this minor flaw, I enthusiastically recommend this book to all clinicians, male and female, as a must have, regardless of their own philosophy and method of treatment.