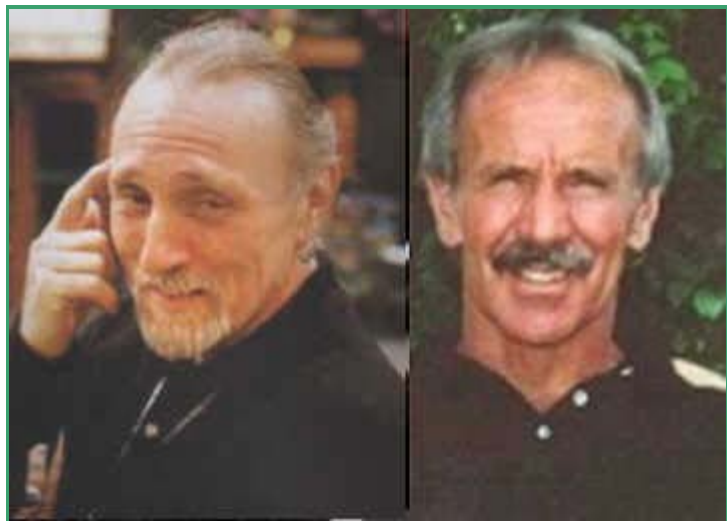


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**A READER'S TREASURY**

**The Structure of Magic, Vol. I  
A Book about Language and  
Therapy  
Chapter: Psychotherapy**

by

**Richard Bandler and John  
Grinder**

Published by Science and Behavior  
Books/CA in 1975

Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2005



"WOW!" exclaims Virginia Satir in the opening sentence of her Foreword to this book and here expresses the real sense we had back in April of 1977 when a colleague and I began reading and working our way through the material of this book. Within a week or two, we heard of a seminar to be given by the authors, Bandler and Grinder, at the Touro Nursing School and we signed up immediately. Almost breathlessly we awaited the beginning of the seminar sitting on the front row. We both expected them to talk about the material covered in this book, and we were disappointed on that score while experiencing a WOW at what they were talking about. It was all new stuff: eye accessing cues, phobia cures using dissociation strategies, and lots of incredible stories of deep and pervasive change in people evoked by the strategies these two had developed out of their studies of the works of Virginia Satir, Gregory Bateson and Milton Erickson, among others. Bandler and Grinder had already begun laying the foundation for the field of neurolinguistic programming (NLP) which was to follow in a few years. This was the book which started it all. This book was the first blaze on a trail into understanding, to be succeeded by "Structure of Magic II", "Changing with Families", and "The Hypnotic Patterns of Milton H. Erickson, MD I and II." Looking back I see a trail of blazes leading up to 2005, a trail that might have never gotten started but for Richard Bandler and John Grinder whose signatures grace the red inside covers of this book. "WOW!"

**[page vii, viii Virginia Satir] ... two intriguing, smart, young men . . . seem to have come up with a description of the predictable elements that make change happen in a transaction between two people. Knowing what these elements are makes it possible to use them consciously and, thus, to have useful methods for inducing change. . . . What they learned relates particularly, in a sophisticated way, to mathematics, physics, neurology and linguistics.**

Use the last two fields Satir mentions, neurology and linguistics, and orchestrate with them conscious applications of inducing change and you have the seed of the new field of neurolinguistic programming (NLP).

Gregory Bateson in his Introduction suggest something very similar. He and his colleagues had attempted something similar about twenty years earlier using cultural contrasts and psychosis as a starting point instead of neurology and linguistics.

**[page x, xi Gregory Bateson] Grinder and Bandler have confronted the problems which we confronted then and this series is the result. They have tools which we did not have - or did not see how to use. They have succeeded in making linguistics into a base for theory and simultaneously into a tool for therapy. This gives them a double control over**

**the psychiatric phenomena, and they have done something which, as I see it today, we were foolish to miss.**

**We already knew that most of the premises of individual psychology were useless, and we knew that we ought to classify modes of communicating. But it never occurred to us to ask about the effects of the modes upon interpersonal relations. In this first volume, Grinder and Bandler have succeeded in making explicit the syntax of how people avoid change and, therefore, how to assist them in changing. Here they focus on verbal communication. In the second volume, top a genera model of communication and change involving the other modes of communication which human beings use to represent and communicate their experience, What happens when messages in digital mode are flung at an analog thinker? Or when visual presentations are offered to an auditory client?**

**We did not see that these various ways of coding — visual, auditory, etc. — are so far apart, so mutually different even in neurophysiological representation, that no material in one mode can ever be of the same logical type as any material in any other mode.**

After describing how "much that so difficult to say in 1955 is strikingly easier to say in 1975" he adds, "May it be heard!" Given the rapid spread of NLP and its practitioners over the past 30 years, I think it is safe to say that it has been heard.

Gregory Bateson was once asked how we would know if computers had become as smart as human beings, and he replied, "We would ask the computer a question and it would answer by saying, 'That reminds me of a story.'" Perhaps it was Bateson who remind Bandler and Grinder of the story they chose for their Preface "The Prince and the Magician" from "The Magus" by John Fowles. In it a prince did not believe in princesses, islands, and God, and set out to find them, only to find out these things did exist, but he couldn't see them because he was under his father's spell. He returns to confront his father:

**[page xiv, xv John Fowles] When he saw his father, he looked him in the eye.**

**"Father, is it true that you are not a real king, but only a magician?"**

**The king smiled and rolled back his sleeves.**

**"Yes, my son, I'm only a magician."**

**"Then the man on the other shore was God."**

**"The man on the other shore was a magician."**

**"I must know the truth, the truth beyond magic."**

**"There is no truth beyond magic," said the king.**

**The prince was full of sadness. He said, "I will kill myself."**

**The king by magic caused death to appear. Death stood in the door and beckoned to the prince. The prince shuddered. He remembered the beautiful but unreal islands and the unreal but beautiful princesses.**

**"Very well," he said, "I can bear it."**

**"You see, my son," said the king, "you, too, now begin to be a magician."**

You cannot be around Bandler and Grinder long before the king's words, "There is no truth beyond magic." is displayed for you. Also the truth of the enchantment by your own parents is revealed by the text in this book. Here's how the enchantment was revealed to me in the course of my studying of these books and the field of NLP which followed quickly upon their heels.

- 1) I was taught how to do techniques which seemed to be something magical.**
- 2) I began immediately to apply them to the situations around me.**
- 3) I soon learned to see that I was surrounded by *experts* who were using those techniques all around me, using them specifically on me, and they had been doing that to**

## **me since I was a child!**

Bandler warned me of that condition as he did all of the students in his seminars. "You are finished learning these techniques; now go out into the world which is filled with experts!" I came to understand that the experts he was talking about were the ordinary people I encountered in the course of a typical day who were using these techniques in their lives, out of their awareness, and often for lugubrious ends. And when those lugubrious ends came about, they complained bitterly about them! First these techniques were pointed out to me, then I learned to use them, and only then was I able to perceive others using them(1). "There is no truth beyond magic."

"What's in the Book" is a concise summary in the prefatory "Warning to the Reader" section. Here's my stripped down version of that useful summary:

**Chapter 1. Reveals a prime source of our enchantment: the maps and models through which we operate on the world. Chapter 2. How we use language systems to create these maps and models of the world.**

**Chapter 3. How language systems are typically used as tools for therapy.**

**Chapter 4. Procedure for learning and incorporating these tools in one's therapy work.**

**Chapter 5. Transcripts with commentary using these tools.**

**Chapter 6. Integrating these tools with established techniques.**

"I don't have any maps or models of the world," you may be thinking. Good! That's where most people begin. No one wants to admit to having been enchanted, especially those who are. Ever ask someone who just executed a post-hypnotic suggestion to take off their left shoe, "Why did you do that?" They say things like, "My foot was itching." or something other contrived alibi. Our enchantment is a post-hypnotic suggestion we introjected at some point in our life that we have no recall ever happening. All of our maps and models of the world are likewise hidden from our view, or at least they were until Alfred Korzybski founded his science of General Semantics. It was through Bandler and Grinder that I first learned of Korzybski's work and undertook to read his masterpiece, [Science and Sanity](#). Several years earlier I had been given a short mini-course by my manager at the Foxboro Co., Per Holst, who told me that in the Norwegian Boy Scout Handbook in the section on map reading, there was a caveat: "When the terrain differs from the map, believe the terrain." It was an excellent application of Korzybski's terse dictum, "The map is *not* the territory." What Bandler and Grinder showed me in addition that we operate on the world out of our maps and models which are at odds with the world. My maps skew our view of the world and the arrow from our bow can end up in someone's rear instead of the bulls-eye target we carefully aimed for.

**[page 13] Our experience has been that, when people come to us in therapy, they typically come with pain, feeling themselves paralyzed, experiencing no choices or freedom of action in their live. What we have found is not that the world is too limited or that there are no choices, but that these people block themselves from seeing those options and possibilities that are open to them since they are not available in their models of the world.**

The three general ways people have of skewing their view of the world and then mistaking that view as the world are: "Generalization, Deletion, and Distortion." In short, generalization is seeing something that isn't there, deletion is ignoring something that is there, and distortion covers all the other ways of skewing one's model of reality.

**[page 16] A person's generalizations or expectations filter out and distort his experience to make it consistent with those expectations. As he has no experiences which challenge**

**his generalizations, his expectations are confirmed and the cycle continues. In this way people maintain their impoverished models of the world.**

It is also a way that people maintain their enriched models of the world: by creating expectations of what they want happening in their world and remaining sharply aware of those events which can lead those expectations into fulfillment. This is the flip side of the impoverished model of people who seek therapy — it is the strategy utilized by those who never show up in therapy groups or individual sessions with a psychotherapist.

In Chapter 3, we find major categories of linguistic structures which people use to create maps and models of their world: Well-Formedness, Constituent Structure, and Logical Semantic Relations. Under the last category, the processes will be recognizable immediately: "Completeness, Ambiguity, Synonymy, Referential Index, Nominalization, and Presupposition" (2).

It is incumbent upon the therapist to learn to recognize these situations when they occur. That reminds me of a story: a young girl in therapy opens her statement to Milton Erickson, "My mother got pregnant out of wedlock, and here I am."

**[page 41] Therapists are now faced with three broad options. They may accept the impoverished mode, they may ask for the missing piece, or they may guess at it. The first option, accepting the impoverished model, presents the difficulty of making the process of therapy slow and tedious, as it places total responsibility for recovering the model's missing pieces on the client, who is there for assistance in the process in the first place.**

Rather than ask the client to supply what was missing, the therapists that Bandler and Grinder modeled (Erickson, Satir, etal) might challenge the client's deep structure which will force the client to "mobilize his resources to reconnect his linguistic model with the world of experience." Everyone can do this, but those in restricted circumstances are, like the prince of the story, "enchanted" by some early caregiver. Similarly with generalizations. "All generalizations are true," the client might say. "What specific generalization are you thinking about which is true," might be the therapist's reply. Or the client might say, "They're against me." and draw the question, "Who specifically do you think is against you?"

The general method for challenging generalizations and deletions is to ask the client "to enact the specific situation from which he generalized and to describe his experience fully as he re-lives it — thus presenting the portion of his experience to which he had failed previously to give a linguistic representation." (Page 49) Ed Hackerson did something rather similar with me in the context of a TA/Gestalt group about 1977. I had just described a dream. I took each part of the dream, became it, and talked as that part would talk. Nothing clicked. Then he told me to get up and skate around the room as the guy in the center of my dream who was slowly skating up the bridge. After about ten feet of gliding across the wooden floor in my stocking feet, I realized how good it felt to be free of responsibility — how good *I felt* to be free of responsibility. It was the first time in my life when I didn't have someone else depending on me, waiting at home for me to bring home a paycheck, etc. I could, for the first time in my life enjoy the freedom from responsibility to others and become responsible for myself, just like the guy skating up the bridge.

**[page 53] It's important that this new portion of his be solidly connected with his experience. To insure this, clients must actually exercise, practice, become familiar with, and experience their new choices. Most therapies have developed specific techniques for accomplishing this: e. g., psychodrama, homework, tasks, etc. The purpose of these techniques is to integrate the new aspect of his model into the client's experience.**

The "Structure of Magic" is more than a toolbook for therapists — it is a guidebook for "enriching one's life and one's potential as a human being." Study how people with impoverished ranges of actions live their lives. Study how to help them expand the range of their lives. And, if you are perceptive, and a little

lucky, you may find yourself noticing how your own range of actions is limited in some fashion, and when you discover that, you'll also discover that a new range of actions has immediately opened up for you. It was *only* your lack of knowing that you had one option that kept you stuck. When you added a second option, you found yourself in a dilemma — which one to choose? It's only when you have three or more options, choices, or actions in a given situation that you can be surely say to be free to choose and act. When you reach the point in your life where these three or more options present themselves as if by magic, you will realize the truth of the king's words, "there is no truth beyond magic."

----- **Reference Links for Bandler and Grinder** -----

Reference Links to Material on [Bandler and Grinder](#)  
written by Bobby Matherne  
<http://www.doyletics.com/arj/bnglinks.htm>

----- **Footnotes** -----

**Footnote 1.** Note that this is the sequence of steps related by Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

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**Footnote 2. Presupposition Glossary**

This volume has a very useful list of presuppositions which people use, which one can read here. Again, I warn you that as you learn about these presuppositions, you will hear people using these on you all the time. It's not that they suddenly learned how to do that, they've been doing it to you all your life, up until now. **Note:** The → points to the presupposition implied by the first statement.

**1.Simple Presuppositions.**

These are syntactic environments in which the existence of some entity is required for the sentence to make sense (to be either true or false).

**(a) Proper Names.**

(*George Smith* left the party early.) → (There exists someone named George Smith) where

**(b) Pronouns.**

*Her, him, they*

(I saw *him* leave.) → (There exists some male [i. e., him])

**(c) Definite Descriptions.**

(I liked *the woman with the silver earrings.*) → (There exists a woman with silver earrings.)

**(d) Generic Noun Phrases.**

Noun arguments standing for a whole class.

(If *wombats* have no trees to climb in, they are sad.) → (There are wombats.)

**(e) Some Quantifiers. *All, each, every, some, many, few, none***

(If *some of the dragons* show up, I'm leaving.) → (There are dragons.)

**2. Complex Presuppositions.**

Cases in which more than the simple existence of an element is presupposed.

**(a) Relative Clauses.**

Complex noun arguments, with a noun followed by a phrase beginning with *who*, *which*, or *that*.  
(*Several of the women who had spoken to you* left the shop.) → (Several women had spoken t you.)

**(b) Subordinate Clauses of Time.**

Clauses identified by the cue words *before*, *after*, *during*, *as*, *since*, *prior*, *when*, *while* (If the judge was home *when I stopped by her house*, she didn't answer her door.) → (I stopped by the judge's house.)

**(c) Cleft Sentence.**

Sentences beginning with It {was/is} noun argument, (It was the extra pressure which shattered the window.) → (Something shattered the window.)

**(d) Psuedo-Cleft Sentences.**

Identified by the form, *What* [Sentence] *is* [sentence] (What Sharon hopes to do is to become well liked.) → (Sharon hopes to do something.)

**(e) Stressed Sentences.**

Voice stress (If Margaret has talked to THE POLICE, we're finished.) → (Margaret has talked to someone.)

**(f) Complex Adjectives.**

*New*, *old*, *former*, *present*, *previous* (If Fredo wears his new ring, I'll be blown away.) → (Fredo had/has an old ring.)

**(g) Ordinal Numerals.**

*First*, *second*, *third*, *fourth*, *another* (If you can find a third clue in this letter, I'll make you a mosquito pie.) → (There are two clues already found.)

**(h) Comparatives.**

*-er*, *more*, *less* (If you know *better* riders than Sue does, tell me who they are.) → (Sue knows [at least] one rider.)

(If you know *better* riders than Sue is, tell me who they are.) → (Sue is a rider.)

**(i) Comparative As.**

*As x as . . .* (If her daughter is *as funny as* her husband is, we'll all enjoy ourselves.) → (Her husband is funny.)

**(j) Repetitive Cue Words.**

*Too*, *also*, *either*, *again*, *back* (If she tells me that *again*, I'll kiss her.) → (Shehas told me that before.)

**(k) Repetitive Verbs and Adverbs.**

Verbs and adverbs beginning with *re*, e.g., *repeatedly*, *return*, *restore*, *retell*, *replace*, *renew* (If he *returns* before I leave, I want to talk to him.) → (He has been here before.)

**(l)Qualifiers.**

*Only*, *even*, *except*, *just* (*Only* Amy saw the bank robbers.) → (Amy saw the bank robbers.)

**(m) Change-of-Place Verbs.**

*Come*, *go*, *leave*, *arrive*, *depart*, *enter* (If Sam has *left* home, he is lost.) → ( Sam has been at home.)

**(n) Change-of-Time Verbs and Adverbs.**

*Begin*, *end*, *stop*, *start*, *continue*, *proceed*, *already*, *yet*, *still*, *anymore* (My bet is that Harry will *continue* to smile.) → (Harry has been smiling.)

**(o) Change-of-State Verbs.**

*Change, transform, turn into, become* (If Mae *turns into* a hippie, I'll be surprised.) —> (Mae is not now a hippie.)

**(p) Factive Verbs and Adjectives.**

*Odd, aware, know, realize, regret* (It is *odd* that she called Maxine at midnight.) —> (She called Maxine at midnight.)

**(q) Commentary Adjectives and Adverbs.**

*Lucky, fortunately, far out, out of sight, groovy, bitchin, . . . innocently, happily, necessarily* (It's *far out* that you understand your dog's feelings.) —> (You understand your dog's feelings.)

**(r) Counterfactual Conditional Clauses.**

Verbs having subjunctive tense. (*If you had listened to me and your father*, you wouldn't be in the wonderful position you're in now.) —> (You didn't listen to me and your father.)

**(s) Contrary-to-Expectation**

*Should.* (*If you should [happen to]* decide you want to talk to me, I'll be hanging out in the city dump.) —> (I don't expect you want to talk to me.)

**(t) Selectional Restrictions.**

(If my professor gets *pregnant*, I'll be disappointed.) —> (My professor is a woman.)

**(u) Questions.**

(Who ate the tapes?) —> (Someone ate the tapes.)

(I want to know who ate the tapes.) —> (Someone ate the tapes.)

**(v) Negative Questions.**

(*Didn't* you want to talk to me?) —> (I thought that you wanted to talk to me.)

**(w) Rhetorical Questions.**

(Who cares whether you show up or not?) —> (Nobody cares whether you show up or not.)

**(x) Spurious *Not*.**

(I wonder if you're *not* being a little unfair.)

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