New Book

Whispering in the Wind
by *John Grinder and Carmen Bostic St. Clair*
A Review by Michael Carroll

John Grinder and Carmen Bostic St Clair have co-authored a new book *Whispering in the Wind.* I was privileged to be the first person in the NLP community to read the book and what a privilege it was. So rich is the content I am now reading it for the third time. As an NLP Trainer I am thrilled by the potential offered to the NLP community by the recommendations laid out in *Whispering in the Wind.* Carmen and John urge us NLPers to take steps for NLP to become a legitimate research community so NLP can take its rightful place alongside other approaches in the studying of human functioning.

This book is essential and fascinating reading for NLP practitioners, modellers, and trainers who will discover many interesting previously unpublished accounts of NLP history. John and Carmen use nearly 30 years of hindsight to critique some of the original models codified by Grinder and Bandler. They describe how they are working to update some of the original principles of NLP in the format of what they call the New Code. They also make some specific recommendations that they consider important for NLP to grow and thrive.

The curious NLPer will discover from reading *Whispering in the Wind* important NLP information, previously unpublished, which could only be written by one of the co–creators of NLP accompanied by another excellent modeller. Every page, and there are 381 of them, carries a potent message, insight, or a real NLP nugget of information. You will be taken on a journey deep into the past where you will discover insights into the strong working relationship Grinder & Bandler formed, how they came to work together in the first place, and how they collaborated so well for seven years. You will learn about the many intellectual influences, rarely mentioned in current NLP writings, which underpin the original NLP Models. Lots of detail is also given to the contexts surrounding the major modelling projects Grinder and Bandler conducted. We are treated to important John Grinder autobiographical content, so interested readers can appreciate the influences from John's personal life that mapped over to his professional life and his hypnotic fascination with excellence. The NLP world is indebted to Carmen Bostic St. Clair for extricating much of the information from John (summarised above) that otherwise might have remained in his head for many years to come.

Carmen and John are explicit with their presentation of the epistemology underlying NLP. They offer user–friendly terms updating the old "four tuple." The principle of "the map is not the territory" (Korsbyski), is also challenged and refined. They lay out a format for presenting hierarchies to avoid some of the past confusion around the subject of so called logical levels. In doing so they distinguish between logical levels and logical types and the differing hierarchies present at various stages of neurological mapping, i.e. iconic part–whole relationships and logical inclusion and constriction relationships. John and Carmen propose that these distinctions are essential for a clean higher order epistemology and make explicit formal coding of the patterning of geniuses. Carmen and John offer a description of the "New Code of NLP," suggesting some improvements where flaws in the original patterning of the "Classic Code" is obvious.

In *Whispering in the Wind* John and Carmen define NLP as "the modelling of behaviours of geniuses." This is consistent with the definitions proposed by them at their seminars (or some variation of that statement). In *Whispering in the Wind,* Carmen and John seem to have partially accepted NLP in its present form (strong emphasis on application) and attribute this to the ineffectiveness of the co–creators (Grinder and Bandler) to make clear and precise what NLP is. John and Carmen stress the importance

of distinguishing between NLP ^{Modelling} and NLP ^{Application}. They mark out the two as I have done in this review in super-script. They say that unless the NLP community can put the emphasis back on modelling there is danger that the field of NLP may just fade away.

Carmen and John state that modelling can be modelled in number of ways and they map out a minimum set of phases for conducting modelling projects. A standardised format for presentation and evaluation of new patterns is also pro-posed with suggestions of how to introduce new models into the international NLP commu-nity. John and Carmen are also very generous in pointing to ar-eas where they consider that further modelling projects can be undertaken to build on the original modelling work of Bandler and Grinder. From reading *Whispering in the Wind* you will learn a lot about mod-elling, as it is featured explicitly in many of the chapters and im-plicitly in all chapters.

To summarise: this is the only NLP book that covers in detail the past, the present, and future of NLP. It is written from the vantage point of one of the co–creators accompanied by an excellent modeller who has the vantage point of directly mod-elling and questioning the co creator. Below I ask them some questions about *Whispering in the Wind* and how they came to write this new NLP classic.

John Grinder and Carmen Bostic St. Clair
Interviewed by Michael Carroll

Michael: What motivated you to write *Whispering in the Wind*?

John and Carmen: It is quite peculiar, the confluence of events that led to its writing. As most readers know, Richard Bandler filed a legal action (two, in fact) in 1996 against initially one of the co–authors of *Whispering* (John Grinder) and subsequently against both of the co–authors of *Whispering* and several other NLP notables. This action alleged a number of things intimately connected with the origins and practice of NLP (for the resolution of these legal claims, see Appendix A of *Whispering*). Preparing an adequate response to these allegations required a deep and thorough review of the historical periods cited. This activity alerted the two of us to the overall development (or, from our point of view, the lack of it in some cases) of the field of NLP. Once we worked our way through the material, it became very obvious to us what had succeeded and what had failed in the enterprise and that some precise proposals were in order if the enterprise was to thrive.

NLP ^{Modeling} has been and still remains unique historically in the study of our species —in particular, in its unwavering focus on one extreme of human func-tioning we call *excellence*. This approach distinguishes itself from other research strategies typically found in psychology and other recognized disciplines in a number of ways. Among those features sharply distinguishing NLP from other recognized disciplines is the deep commitment during its unique modelling strategy to an unconscious (relatively free of intellectual and linguistic filters) assimilation of the patterning to be captured from the model who has inspired the modelling. As detailed in *Whispering*, this deep non–cognitive identification between the modeller and the model is sustained until the modeller demonstrates his ability to replicate the effectiveness of the model for that set of patterns that are the focus of the modelling activity. This learning strategy (unconscious modeling) has informed human affairs for centuries (consider, for example, the medieval Euro-pean guilds) and is the ongoing basis for the most fundamental and crucial learn-ing that occurs in childhood. Its explication allows recognition of the validity and power of such unconscious learning strategy and therefore, through its precise representation in *Whispering,* establishes a welcome (and in our opinion, neces-sary) counterweight to the left brain dominant learning strategies found in nearly all educational systems in the world. It is interesting to note that one of us (co–author Carmen Bostic St. Clair) won a national (USA) educational award in the '60s for designing and implementing a series of participatory patterns that em-body the principles of such unconscious learning.

Another important distinction in *Whispering* is the insistence on a discrete model for the analysis of major portions of human behavior—especially those at the extreme such as the focus of NLP—excellence. We argue that the application of a statistical analytic strategy in this arena (and further on) clearly obscures rather than illuminates the data sets.

There is, of course, a more personal dimension involved in writing this book. The strategies, tools and techniques of NLP represent an opportunity unlike any other for the exploration of human functioning, or more precisely, that rare and valuable subset of human functioning known as genius. Each of us as co–authors are committed to advancing the field of NLP, if for no other reason than it offers a unique research strategy to capture and promote excellence in human affairs—a potential that we have realized cross culturally in our consulting work within large systems all over the western world. In the absence of alternatives to the unique approach at the heart of NLP—modelling—we both felt it would be a significant loss should this endeavour go awry—thus, the motivation for working up a specific set of recommendations for putting the enterprise on an effective path to success. From our point of view, such a loss would be very much like the loss of an entire species, with its unique contribution to the larger system.

Michael: Why the title?

John and Carmen: It's a metaphor just like the cover of the book itself. Again, we had multiple motivations. The title satisfies certain aesthetic criteria

we share—whimsicality, for example. Further, it is our experience that so much attention, energy, and time is devoted in present NLP activities to marketing, that in the roar of that activity, it struck us both that our voices could well be lost in the cacophony of such furious activity as well as the well–known fact that in certain contexts, whispering is a far effective way of securing people's attention and therefore constitutes an effective mode of communication.

Without the wind, sediment settles and becomes trapped in the pockets within the crevices of the terrain. Then a gust of wind once again frees them to move to places unimagined.

Michael: From reading the book and knowing you both—I have observed you work together excellently as a team. Can you describe your differing roles in the writing of the book?

John and Carmen: The question of effective collaboration is of great importance to both for us personally and professionally as well as of equal importance in other contexts such as business, teams, seminars, consulting, research…

It is not easy given our total involvement in the research and writing of *Whispering* to tease out our differing roles. Clearly, as you state in your introduction to the book, Carmen provoked, dissected, and made sense out of much of the initial experiences and contexts of discovery that John as the co–creator of NLP participated in with Richard Bandler. Equally clearly, there are segments of *Whispering* where John is simply describing his personal recollections of discoveries.

Indeed, the new patterning and fresh modes of analysis reflect some 12 years of collaboration between the two of us. Perhaps the collaborative style is best described as reciprocal —there is no section of the book that does not reflect the ideas, work, and the personal touch and style of each of the co–authors.

All this further points to the fact that there is no explicit model of collaboration, and to the possibility of modeling the process of collaboration itself as a brilliant contribution.

Michael: In the first section of the book you write about NLP as a higher order epistemology, can you explain?

John and Carmen: Well, now, that *is* a key issue—and as you well know, we worked very hard to find an appropriate way of conveying what we mean by this characterization.

To begin with, it is important to have a common starting point––*epistemology,* as we use the term in this work, refers to the systematic study of how we know what (we think) we know and the rules of evidence that support such knowledge or not. In brief, we propose that various scientific disciplines operate with distinctive domains. Their domains are distinctive not only in the sense of the data that are to be described and ultimately explained in these various disciplines but also in the sense of their relationships to their epistemological distance from the world about us. For example, in physics, and more particularly in those aspects of research in physics where instrumentation and measurement play

a crucial role, the patterning is literally about the patterning of the physical universe relatively free (how free depends on the answers not yet available to questions about the epistemology of instrumentation) from human perceptual categories imposed by the fundamental neurological and linguistic categories through which we perceive the world about us darkly.

Psychology, on the other hand, has nothing (with the notable exception of endeavors such as psychophysics) to do with such matters as the patterning explored by physics but has a focus on the patterning available subsequent to human neurological and linguistic (as well as other coding) filtering.

In particular, NLP ^{Application} in no way touches on the world of patterning explored by physics but has as its focus the world created by the transforms of the human nervous system and language. The domain of NLP ^{Application} is representations, pure and simple, and is incapable of making contributions to the exploration and mapping of the world about us. This has both limiting and liberating consequences as described in our book.

Michael: You treat the readers to the first–ever published work describing the intellectual and personal strands of historical influence that enabled/inspired the original NLP modelling projects. Can you briefly share with the readers the major

influences and the specific way such influences made an impact?

John and Carmen: It is quite easy to list the influences. They include: Chomsky and the generative grammar movement, Bateson, Erickson, Automata Theory, Logic… We will pass here on any attempt to characterize which specific portions of the work of these people/disciplines mentioned are relevant and how specifically they impacted the creation of NLP. We devote some 80+ pages in *Whispering* itself to this task. Our intention in explicitly presenting these influences is to invite the interested researcher to check the sources with perhaps two motivations in mind:

1. to verify for themselves that the assimilated materials were properly extracted for application in NLP patterning

2. to mine the influences described for gems that we might have overlooked in our historical raiding parties.

Michael: Have you noticed a common trait in the geniuses you modelled and worked with?

John and Carmen: Yes, of course, there are a number of such "traits." At a relatively abstract level there is much communality among the various geniuses who have inspired NLP modelling projects and are the source for many of its patterns. We will mention one such characteristic.

However, we register a warning to the readers—both in regard to this interview and to the book itself. The idea of a trait independent of context is a dangerous one. It is much akin to inviting some extra–terrestrial to describe the game of tennis, restrict this being to observations covering only half of the tennis court and then criticize this being for failing to arrive at a useful description of the game of tennis. Traits are strange Occidental creatures that have their tentative existence only in the limited conscious minds of western trained observers. They exist only in a world that contains the presuppositions that one can segment an essential unity into parts, study the parts individually, discover whatever patterning is available within each of the parts in question and then assemble the patterning of the parts as if they somehow represent the patterning of the original whole phenomenon. We trust that it is sufficient to explicate this presupposition to alert the reader to the dangers involved. If not, such a reader is urged to read the extended epistemological critique offered in *RedTail Math: the epistemology of everyday life—modelling* (working title) by Bostic and Grinder to be published in 2003.

There is one trait or characteristic—called focus—that is common to each and every genius we have had the pleasure of working with. Suppose that we define focus as the ability to choose to fix one's attention exclusively on certain variables immediately relevant to task and to maintain that focus independent of the remaining elements that constitute your context. Those elements not relevant to the task simply do not exist for the genius when committed to her or his task.

Please note the questioning–begging nature of our response in the above paragraph. For example, how do you know which elements in the context are relevant and which simply constitute distractions that dissipate the attention of the person performing the task? How specifically (assuming that you can identify the relevant variables) do you achieve and sustain such focus in a practical sense? Does the set of relevant variables shift from context to context (yes, of course) and how do you know which differing contexts require which shifts to which variables (good question!)?

How are such shifting foci on different variables actually achieved?

For us, these are simultaneously a critique of our own response and an indictment of the segmentation strategy so common in the west and so impoverished in some of its consequences.

Michael: You refer to the six step reframe as "The Breakthrough Pattern" why is this so?

John and Carmen: As we detail in *Whispering*, six step reframing contains precisely the differences that correct the design flaws of much of the Classic Code patterning originally done by Grinder and Bandler. For example, the explicit inclusion of unconscious patterning (inspired by Erickson) as an essential and integral part of the change process and the re–assignment of certain classes of choices by the client (e.g. the desired state) from the conscious mind to the unconscious mind serve as examples. It is almost unthinkable that Bandler and Grinder missed this requirement for effective and ecological change formats. In fact, as described in our book, it is clear that the actual work done by these two men (Grinder and Bandler) both in their public demonstrations as well as their private work typically included the use of unconscious processes. However, this usage was not coded into the classic code models and apparently became lost in the down line generations of students who did not have direct access to such demonstrations. In other words, this commitment to the wisdom of unconscious processes while present in the behaviors (especially ongoing calibration) of the two men who created NLP was not coded in the patterning and thus remained unexplicated, unmodelled tacit knowledge that was subsequently lost in the translation to new practitioners.

This particular format—six step reframing—serves both as a template for the critique of the classic code work by Grinder and Bandler and as a design guide for the New Code as well as much work done by the authors in their consulting activities and seminars—this is part of the sense of a breakthrough pattern intended by us.

Please read and evaluate the extended critique of the classic code in

Whispering and especially the recommendations about how specifically to convert classic code formats into effective and ecological formats for change work. Six step reframing is an example of how to ensure effective and ecological change—please remember it is simply an example (and one produced unconsciously by a specific person in responding to a specific context of discovery). There are dozens of ways to use the insights provided historically by six step reframing without the necessity to continue practicing this particular ritual.

Michael: You write about the "New Code" (your latest work). How does the "New Code" differ from the "Classic Code?"

John and Carmen: Yes we have introduced new distinctions and patterning in the New Code and it does not represent our latest work. As we state in the Preface to *Whispering*, our intention for writing this work does not include a presentation of our most recent work—these models will be presented in a separate publication.

The New Code differs from the Classic Code by a specific set of distinctions such as the one mentioned in the previous question. For example, the clients' conscious minds are not involved in the development of the desired state, the resources and behaviours to be developed…, these matters are assigned to precisely the clients' unconscious processes. This set of differences is detailed in *Whispering.*

Michael: You make several recommendations to the NLP community to take action on. How would you like to see NLP evolve in the future?

John and Carmen First of all, as you mention in your framing for this interview, we propose that unless significant effort is committed to the further modeling of geniuses and the patterning of excellence that they represent, NLP will be reduced to NLP [Application], and quite likely within a decade or two simply incorporated into other still developing fields of inquiry. It is literally impossible at present to attend a well–organized management training in the west without encountering patterns such as the meta model, representational systems or anchoring as integrated elements of the program whether credit is given to its original coding in NLP work or not. Such integration is to be applauded. However it does highlight the issue of where new and revolutionary patterning will come from. Our response is quite simple—a renewed commitment to modeling, the core activity of NLP, will provide such a source.

Michael: You have invited curious NLPers to participate in an online discussion in a specific forum we have set up to debate the contents and proposals laid out in *Whispering in the Wind.* What role do you think online discussion can play in the future of NLP?

John and Carmen:
We are uncertain about the contribution and are somewhat concerned that establishing the web site (*nlpwhisperinginthewind.com*) will inadvertently exclude portions of the community from participating. Be that as it may, it would be foolish in the extreme not to use this remarkably quick and nearly ubiquitous form of electronic communication to promote a lively discussion and exchange among NLP practitioners. Our hope is that by establishing this web site, we are empowering members of the

practicing NLP community to create their own context and advance the quality of work in the field.

Michael: How would you like that discussion to evolve?

John and Carmen: As the interests and competencies of the NLP community dictate—naturally, our own preferences and desires with respect to the development of the field of NLP are well documented within *Whispering* itself. As we state in the book, the field of NLP has survived the personalities of its co–creators and the recommendations we offered are simply those of two concerned individuals within that community, Bostic and Grinder. The future of the discipline of NLP is much larger than the concerns of these three people and will ultimately succeed or fail through action or inaction of the majority of the members of the NLP community.

Michael: What other suggestions would you like to make to the NLP community, besides treating themselves to a copy of *Whispering in the Wind*?

John and Carmen: We will rest our case as presented in *Whispering*—perhaps one final and somewhat urgent suggestion: *do something, do anything even if it's perceived as "wrong," act!*

To participate in the ongoing discussion by the NLP community and to order your copy of *Whispering in the Wind* visit www.nlpwhisperinginthewind.com

Michael Carroll is the founder and course director of the NLP Academy, a London based company that is committed to advancing the field of NLP through collaboration partnership, community and ongoing commitment to personal and professional excellence.

Michael is currently collaborating with John Grinder and Carmen Bostic St Clair with www.nlpwhisperinginthewind.com, a web site established by John, Carmen, and Michael to facilitate the ongoing discussion that the book *Whispering in the Wind* will stimulate.

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