

# ACCESSING ARCHAIC INVOLVEMENT: TOWARD UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF ERICKSON'S HYPNOSIS<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The "essence" underlying Milton Erickson's unique style and uncommon technical maneuvers inheres in his uncommon skill at eliciting patients' archaic involvement. Archaic involvement, as characterized by perspectiveless overevaluation, is explicated and America's beloved tale, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, is used to evoke further perspectives. The importance of such regressive object-representations are noted. Erickson's uncanny ability to access archaic involvement and thereby profoundly influence his client is analyzed in terms of his: (a) relationship style; (b) therapeutic "persona"; (c) theoretical orientation; and (d) specific micro-techniques and interventions. Clinical findings derived from a case transcript and videotaped work are employed throughout to substantiate the argument that Erickson fosters regressive interpersonal shifts. Implications of this skill are discussed, and further avenues for investigation are suggested.

There is scarcely a worker in hypnosis who does not appreciate Milton Erickson's originality, fertile imagination, remarkable ability to read the unconscious, uncanny skill in creating treatment interventions, and comfort in his use of therapeutic power. Nonetheless, as Hilgard (1984) noted, a dispassionate and scholarly clarification of the "central core" underlying Erickson's versatile and varied practices remains somehow missing. J. Barber (1985) suggested that Erickson may have deliberately presented his material so that it would not be amenable to logical scrutiny.

I believe it is time to examine Erickson's methods and impact. Most of the existing literature seeking to address the "essence" of Erickson's work focuses around those "artifacts" associated with the man's unusual personality, unconventional therapeutic style and practice, extraordinary personal history, and unorthodox and somewhat contradictory theoretical stance toward both hypnosis and psychotherapy.<sup>4</sup> A so-called "Lavender

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<sup>4</sup>A little known exception can be found in Masserman's (1941) cogent and classically psychoanalytic discussion of one of Erickson's early case reports. His analysis antedates the present thesis and uses the language of libidinal-drive theory to highlight Erickson's fostering of a "deeper and more specific interpersonal relation with his patient . . . in which he would play the role of parental surrogate [p. 177]."

hail mob" (Bowers, 1985, p. 75) has grown up around Erickson — a veritable cult of rather unquestioning and overly idealizing disciples (Bowers, 1985; Diamond, 1983; Fromm, 1981; Hammond, 1984; Lindner, 1982). As a backlash, others are increasingly engaging in *ad hominem* attacks (e.g., Gibson, 1984). This curious paucity of balanced inquiry reflects the phenomenon Bion (1974) observed, wherein "people do not generally appreciate the investigation of the deity whose cult is at the time flourishing [p. 87]."<sup>5</sup>

Few, however, would disagree with Hilgard (1984) in noting that Erickson has always been a controversial figure known for giving ingenious orders which his patients followed. But what accounts for Erickson's extraordinary ability to gain patient compliance? Bowers (1985) discussed Erickson's use of persuasive rhetoric and beguiling example as indicative of a "confident illusionist"; Kirmayer (1985, 1988) viewed Erickson as a word magician speaking in the language of common sense; Van Dyck (1982) analogously linked Erickson to the oracle of Delphi; and, Hilgard (1984, 1985, 1988) chose the metaphors of "playwright and stage director" to highlight Erickson's planning and directing dramatic sequences of events uniquely designed for each patient. It is my purpose to further elucidate the "mystery" underlying Erickson's unique style and micro-techniques of hypnosis by positing that its "essence" inheres in his uncommon skill at eliciting archaic involvement by facilitating regressive shifts in his patients' interpersonal processes.

I will begin by briefly clarifying the concept of archaic involvement. I shall then do some storytelling of my own in order to place Erickson's approach to archaic involvement in a broader perspective, while considering the importance of this more regressive object-relational phenomenon. Next, speculations are made as to how Erickson actively evokes this dimension of hypnotic experience, and clinical evidence will be offered in support of this hypothesis. Finally, implications will be considered and future directions for exploration will be suggested.

### *The Nature of Archaic Involvement*

The concept of archaic involvement was introduced to the hypnosis literature by Shor (1959, 1962, 1979) as one of his three dimensions of hypnotic depth.<sup>6</sup> The concept remains poorly understood, although efforts

<sup>5</sup>An important question concerns both the cultural context of Erickson's *practice* (e.g., to what degree did his therapeutic posture meet the expectations of a small town patient population in the mid-Twentieth Century?) as well as his *popularity* among contemporary professionals (e.g., to what extent does his anti-theoretical stance resonate with the technological and economic issues facing Western culture urbanites of the 1980s?). A discussion of these questions is beyond the scope of the present article and most certainly will benefit from the hindsight of another decade.

<sup>6</sup>The other two dimensions are termed *trance* and *nonconscious involvement*. They refer, respectively, to the fading of the generalized reality orientation (i.e., altered state of consciousness) and the nonconscious fulfillment of the role of hypnotic subject (i.e., dissociated role-taking).

have recently been made to both develop and investigate its features (Diamond, 1987; Nash, 1984; Nash & Spinler, in press; Shor, 1979). Shor (1979) defined it as: "the extent to which at any given moment in time there are archaic, primitive modes of relating to the hypnotist that echo back to the love relationships of early life [p. 126]." Thus, there is a temporary displacement or "transference" onto the hypnotist of core emotive attitudes originally formed early in life, most typically in regard to parents.<sup>7</sup> It is characterized by a "perspectiveless overevaluation of the person of the hypnotist out of keeping with the objective situation [Shor, 1979, p. 126]." The subject is motivated to win the hypnotist's love and curry favor by incorporating the hypnotist's wishes as if one's own. The hypnotist assumes an unusual importance, and the subject wants "to please the hypnotist as a labor of love [Shor, 1979, p. 126]." Indeed, research reported by Nash (1984; Nash & Spinler, in press) utilizing an inventory constructed to measure hypnotic archaic involvement, substantiates that such regressive shifts in interpersonal processes are a core feature of the hypnotic experience.

Others have considered the importance of preformed hypnotic transferences which tend to be intense, and typically pertain to an omnipotent, benevolent, or sadistic hypnotist (Morris & Gardner, 1959). These ubiquitous hypnotic transferences, consisting of unconscious mythical beliefs concerning hypnosis and the hypnotist, tend to be *utilized* rather than *analyzed* by hypnotherapists (Fromm, 1984). Moreover, Smith (1984) has emphasized the importance of unconscious "curative fantasies" concerning the efficacy of the hypnotic procedure and relationship that patients often bring to hypnotherapy. These components of archaic involvement may be potentiated by the hypnotist's prehypnotic behavior.

Archaic involvement appears to develop as the hypnotist *actively* attempts to produce it (Diamond, 1987; Shor, 1979). As Shor (1979) remarked: "Only the hypnotist who tries by his words and demeanor to infuse the hypnotic proceedings with the instigators of archaic involvement is likely to produce much of it [p. 126]." Thus, the hypnotist might talk to his/her subjects as if they were children while assuming such roles as a parental figure, all-knowing teacher, powerful leader, charismatic authority, therapeutic do-gooder and lover, protector, or comforter. These roles tend to help the hypnotist win the subject's belief, trust, love, admiration, loyalty, and devotion (Shor, 1979). Diamond, (1987) discussed

<sup>7</sup>I have elsewhere (cf. Diamond, 1987) attempted to delineate more specific object relational factors underlying this general construct in proposing that *transference* represents only one of several relational dimensions underlying archaic involvement. Two additional pre-oedipal and more archaic dimensions were posited: (a) a *symbiotic or fusional alliance*, wherein the hypnotist's real or presumed characteristics are identified with at a bodily-level and, consequently, the hypnotist is experienced as an actual part of the subject's self providing a sense of protection, safety, and comfort, and (b) an *irrational component of a working alliance* founded upon an overestimation of the hypnotist's powers which the subject subsequently identifies with and surrenders to.

how skilled hypnotherapists actively attempt to form "irrational" alliances by becoming idealized and experienced as purely internal figures." Indeed, Erickson was a master in fostering such archaic involvement by providing the very model of an omnipotent physician "endowed with sufficient emotional cathexis and symbolic authority . . . [to] influence previously inaccessible unconscious dynamisms [Masserman, 1941, p. 177]."

#### *A Relevant Story*

Erickson frequently employed storytelling and the use of anecdotes to communicate more evocatively (Erickson & E. L. Rossi, 1979). In order to view Erickson's hypnosis from a broader perspective, I shall borrow this device to synopsise America's best-loved fairy tale, a quintessential account of archaic involvement. I am referring to L. Frank Baum's (1900/1960), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The story begins with a cyclone unexpectedly depositing Dorothy in the land of Oz. She seeks out Oz, the Great Wizard of the City of Emeralds, in order to be returned home to Kansas. Many adventures befall her and her three new friends as together they journeyed on the Yellow Brick Road looking for the Great Wizard who will hopefully use his awesome power to fulfill their wishes.

Arriving at the Emerald City, they are surprised to discover that no one has ever seen the "real Oz." Moreover, green spectacles have to be worn by all to prevent being blinded by the city's "brightness and glory." They are eventually granted separate audiences with the Great Oz who assumes varying forms for each visitor. Each is promised that their wish will be granted when they kill the Wicked Witch of the West. The companions set out after and kill her, and then returned to collect their rewards. Unfortunately, however, the Great Oz sought to renege on his promises and when the increasingly dauntless Cowardly Lion gave a loud roar to frighten the Wizard, a screen fell over and Oz was exposed as a kindly, pathetic, common, and bumbling man hiding his very human insecurity behind a blustery facade. He admitted to being a "humbug" and confessed to having fooled everyone by his deceptive "tricks" such as ordering that green spectacles be worn to make everything look greener than it really was. He explained how he was an erstwhile circus balloonist from Omaha fortunately mistaken for a great Wizard. When the companions agreed to "keep his secret," Oz sought somehow to fulfill his promises and, using his ingenious imagination coupled with the faith of his followers, the wishes of Dorothy's three friends were fulfilled. The Wizard even tried to explain his "magical art" by stating: "How can I help being a humbug when all these people make me do things that everybody knows can't be done? [Baum, 1900/1960, p. 199]." Still, it took more than imagination to carry Dorothy back to Kansas, and the Wizard arranged for a balloon to be launched. The balloon journey was ill-fated, however, as it accidentally embarked with only the Wizard aboard.

"Irrational" working and fusional alliances are built upon more infantile and idealized wishes and are not based on contemporary aspects of one's psychic functioning.

As he waved goodbye, he was remembered by all in the Emerald City as a friend and a most Wonderful Wizard. Keeping his secret and using her own resourcefulness to find a way home, Dorothy discovered that she *always* had had the power herself in her Silver Shoes, and thus clapping her heels together, she returned home to Aunt Em and Uncle Henry in Kansas.

Before leaving this wonderful story, I would like to quote Martin Gardner who wrote in the Introduction to the 1960 Dover Edition: "Are the respected Wizards of our Emerald Cities really wizards, or just amiable circus humbugs who keep us supplied with colored glasses that make life seem greener than it really is? [p. 4]."

*Beyond the Wizard: The Importance of Archaic Involvement*

Erickson's "magical art" rests on the ubiquity of such archaic ties. Freud (1919/1955) long ago noted that human beings' irresolution and craving for authority should never be underestimated. Fenichel (1945) stressed the universal yearning for "omnipotent beings whose help, comfort, and protection he could depend on [p. 491]." Kaiser (1965) considered the "universal psychopathology" of attempting to create in real life the fantasy of fusion. Still others (Kohut, 1971, 1977; Kriegman & Solomon, 1985; Newman, 1983) suggested that the motivation to yield to or to create such charismatic leaders stems from the desire to lose all boundaries and become lost within a greater whole — an experience elsewhere termed a fusional or symbiotic alliance (Diamond, 1987). This "search for oneness" (cf. Silverman, Lachman, & Milich, 1982) is engaged by charismatic leaders as we become enticed by our own archaic wishes to avoid uncertainty, ambivalence, and the complexities of maturation, perhaps even creating such leaders to save us from ourselves. Indeed, the exercise of our own powers of mind and will is often quite burdensome (Rioch, 1970); moreover, as Schafer (1983) notes, there are countless narcissistic wishes and temptations to play guru and purvey wisdom. Thus, when the charismatic leader taps his/her baton, "the feeling aroused in us goes far beyond listening and agreeing. It becomes adoration [Newman, 1983, p. 205]." The loyalty of the impassioned follower is known to be blind, unassailable, and beyond discussion.

Nevertheless, such features of archaic involvement may likewise facilitate psychological health, growth, and adaptation (Chertok, 1984; Diamond, 1987; Silverman et al., 1982). For example, research from nonhypnotic settings has demonstrated that unconsciously gratifying symbiotic or fusional fantasies, much like those evoked by charismatic leaders, may be adaptive and even ameliorative under certain conditions (Silverman et al., 1982). These findings suggest that the corrective value of nondirected or neutral hypnosis may result from the unconscious hypnotic activation of such fusional alliances. Indeed, the unconscious activation of symbiotic fantasies prior to hypnosis enhances subsequent hypnotic susceptibility and rapport with the hypnotist (Frauman, Lynn, Hardaway, & Molteni,

1984). Moreover, hypnotherapists frequently activate fusional alliances and gratify symbiotic wishes by their verbal and nonverbal interventions (Diamond, 1987). A crucial and still unanswered question concerns the more specific therapeutic implications of archaic involvement — thus, in what circumstances is it therapeutically advantageous to facilitate archaic involvement, and in what circumstances is it better to interpret and work through the nature of such involvement?

The hypnotist as object of such archaic involvement becomes a kind of wizard, sorcerer, savior, and sage. Indeed, therapeutic hypnosis rests partially on the hypnotherapist's ability to participate in what Orne (1962) referred to as "folie à deux," and yet recognize he/she does not acquire the power ascribed by the patient. In her penetrating analysis of charismatic "superstars," Newman (1983) suggests how someone like Erickson may draw such projected power. She said:

The element of need combined with strangeness creates a climate that nurtures magnetism. Something special or alien becomes a boost to wonder and awe that shrouds the charismatic soul. It may be a manner of dress or hair style, the moustache or the . . . compelling eyes of Merlin. It may be Eastern robes in Western cities, or the vocal range and unaccustomed gestures, or a saintly or satanic manner [p. 202].

Imagine in this respect the magnetic effects of an inscrutable, silver-haired, moustached man wearing purple colors and turquoise jewelry who displays unusual artifacts, possesses piercing eyes, an uncommon vocal inflection and use of wording, and, while riddled with physical ailments, is undaunted in spirit!

#### *How Erickson Evokes Archaic Involvement*

Erickson's "mystery" can be better understood by clarifying the unconscious meaning of his strange and unusual style, as well as his use of gesture, vocal inflection, manner, and verbal content. Borrowing Hilgard's (1984, 1985, 1988) theatrical metaphor, the act occurs when the proper scene is created, and Erickson actively sets the stage through his relationship style, therapeutic "persona," uncommon treatment orientation, and technical maneuvers. In this respect, the elderly Erickson's hypnosis is largely characterized by his active evocation of nonconscious role-playing as well as by archaic involvement (cf. Shor, 1959, 1962). His hypnotherapeutic work evidences considerably less effort to evoke the trance dimension, focusing instead on the more inclusive "common everyday, and naturally occurring trance" (see Erickson, E. L. Rossi, & S. H. Rossi, 1976). As K. Thompson mentioned, he tended to rely, particularly in his later years, on his "reputation and skill in presenting options [cited in Hammond, 1984, p. 241]."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>This appears to be in contrast with Erickson's earlier work in the 1930s and 1940s on the hypnotic investigation of psychodynamic processes (see Erickson, 1980b, Volume III). These studies are characterized by Erickson's efforts to produce more profound alterations in the generalized reality orientation of his subjects and patients.

Erickson used his personality, style of engaging, and communication skills to create the conditions for what Ferenczi (1916) considered the patient's "surrender to a loved and feared adversary" and became for many an "idealized and omnipotent physician." This is *not*, however, to imply that Erickson was fully conscious of the underlying meaning of what he did. How did Erickson actively become an object of such awesome proportions and, as such, acquire his extraordinary license to influence, for better or worse?

Erickson's *relationship style* must first be considered. While Erickson frequently shared personal anecdotes, artifacts, and even familial interactions, his stance remained strategic, parental, and kindly authoritative. Unlike psychoanalysts seeking to both evoke and analyze archaic transferences while realistically acknowledging (and hopefully largely working through) the iatrogenic nature of such involvement, Erickson appears to have rarely varied from his characteristic relational mode, either with his patients, students, or colleagues, in order to discuss the significance of such created illusions. Haley (1973) suggested that Erickson avoided this sort of examination as a result of his implicit belief that such dynamic understanding undermines real change. Moreover, Erickson believed that rational examination and theoretical analysis contributed to patient resistance and clinical rigidity among students and colleagues. Unfortunately, such omissions maximize archaic involvement and directly contribute to the pervasive imitation, identification, and uncritical idealization of Erickson among many professionals. As with the inhabitants of the Emerald City who never saw "the real Oz," Erickson is remembered as a wonderful Wizard while the relational basis of his "tricks" remains a secret prone to misrepresentation.

Erickson's *therapeutic "persona"* and style of engaging were consistently parental and authoritative, albeit frequently permissive, supportive, flexible, and benevolent. He always remained in control and typically insisted that his orders be carried out strictly and without question (Hilgard, 1984). His methods seem to be based on a "paternalistic, doctor-knows-best approach [T. X. Barber, 1981, p. 826]," undoubtedly congruent with the expectations of his clientele. His transactions exemplified a benevolent parent interacting with children. His tone was soothing, and he would often make comforting parental statements like: "Well, my son, tell me . . ." (cf. Lustig, 1975). Masserman (1941) noted how Erickson would establish a particular transference identification in order to secure a "manipulative purchase on the patient's ego . . . to influence . . . childhood fixations and attitudes [p. 177]." The primitive imagoes evoked by his style ranged from all-accepting, "symbiotic mother" to a challenging "archaic father," perhaps thereby promoting individuation by fomenting maternal separation from symbiotic ties. Erickson's propensity to empathize with a patient's need to be challenged is what makes him a "loved and feared adversary" (see Ferenczi, 1916) and partially accounts for the fre-

quently phase-inappropriate imitation of his paradoxical style among therapists poorly trained in developmental theory.

One of Erickson's most unusual and provocative therapeutic practices involved his assuming the role of a surrogate parent in order to hypnotically supply his patients with the basic life experiences of which they had been deprived. Erickson played the role of kindly, "Dutch uncle" confidant — hypnotically visiting his patients at earlier stages of their lives under the guise of the "February Man" (Erickson & E. L. Rossi, 1979). Thus, he sought to modify internal reality by integrating hypnotic alterations of a problematic personal history with real-life memories. For example, in a fascinating 1945 case study, Erickson became the "February Man" visiting his female patient many times during four lengthy hypnotherapy sessions. The newly available transcript is the only complete verbatim record of an entire hypnotherapy case from the middle of Erickson's career (cf. Erickson & E. L. Rossi, in press). Twenty-five hours of audio-tapes were transcribed into nearly 30,000 words of dialogue. This author counted both Erickson's and his patient's word totals to further substantiate the archaic, parental nature of the interaction. Not surprisingly, the transaction was quite didactic and reminiscent of a teacher-student exchange. It was verbally dominated by Erickson who spoke 62% of the time (18,163 words) to the patient's 38% (11,156 words). Additional evidence is provided in the elderly Erickson's less genetically oriented videotaped work produced by Lustig (1975). Once again, Erickson dominated the verbal exchanges, speaking some 75% of the time compared to his subject's 25%. Contemporary reality-based relational features are lacking, while archaic fusional alliances are evoked by Erickson's repeated suggestions that he and the patient "can be all alone" (in spite of the presence of a cameraman, etc.) with there being "no reason to be afraid of me." Archaic wishes are further gratified by Erickson's gentle and soothing parental tone and stance, while control is maintained as he invites his patient to "enjoy being irritable with me."

Erickson's uncommon theoretical *orientation* to hypnosis and treatment further elicits more primitive modes of perceiving and construing consensual and historical reality. Bowers (1985) noted that Erickson often "smudges and crosses the boundary between outer reality and the inner experience of it [p. 77]" in his efforts to influence his patients' perspective on reality. The 1945 "February Man" case study (Erickson & E. L. Rossi, in press) evinces Erickson's relative lack of concern with consensual reality and the consequent augmentation of archaic involvement. For example, he created the "February Man" identity by directly suggesting that he was safe, trustworthy, and "with" the patient (see Erickson & E. L. Rossi, in press, p. 43). His omniscience was skillfully implied by telling her that he (i.e., February man) "always remember(s) [p. 120]," and that he can solve her problems for her "very neatly [p. 287]." Idealization is augmented as he invites her to feel mad at him prior to his saying that he (i.e., a psychiatrist) "won't take it personally [p. 293]." Finally, he adopts a sphinx-like posture



promoting the projection of primitive imagoes by telling her: "You don't know what my purpose is . . . but there is a purpose. I can't explain it to you, . . . [p. 280]." Thus, he used the "February Man" to create a developmental history for his patients as he thought it should have been, rather than how it was experienced.

Erickson used a model of an autonomous and omnipotent unconscious; that is, an unconscious that can be "trusted," has recourse to all experience, and essentially knows and can decide what is best. For example, he tells his patient in the Lustig (1975) videotape that: "Your unconscious knows all about it; it will inform the conscious mind when it is ready to know." Later the patient is told that: "You can pretend anything and master it." It is crucial, however, to note that unconscious processes can not always be trusted to heal and, in fact, may remain developmentally arrested while defending, cajoling, and seducing. Thus, in subtle respects, a pre-ambivalent mode of relating to external objects is fostered — in short, a mode gratifying more archaic wishes for omnipotence where internal and external reality are undifferentiated, and objects (i.e., people) may be controlled by thought.<sup>10</sup>

The fulfillment of these more childish omnipotent wishes and defenses evokes a protective, pre-ambivalent, and symbiotic relationship to the hypnotist characterized by idealization and incorporative efforts toward the omnipotent authority. The massive identification with Erickson among professionals, students, and probably patients can be understood as an attempt to internalize his perceived power. Unfortunately, we have little data from his case reports as to such identification among patients, although several brief therapy patients, who were also therapists, have followed in his footsteps — some later relocating to Phoenix; others becoming spokespersons for "Ericksonian hypnosis and psychotherapy"; and still others absurdly mimicking the mannerisms, posture, gestures, vocal inflections, and adages of the elderly Erickson.

Erickson's therapeutic skills in using selected *technical maneuvers* involving intonation, wording, nonverbal communication, indirect suggestion, metaphor, and anecdote must also be considered (cf. Erickson, 1980a). Contrary to popular belief, he frequently spent long periods of time thinking about and planning his interventions (Hammond, 1986). In addition to using these patterns to evoke both patient resources and archaic alliances, he adopted an exceptionally confident manner, even when prescribing unusual assignments (McCue, 1984). Thus, patient faith and positive expectation in the efficacy of his interventions were maximized. Moreover, indirect suggestion itself may be considered "an object relationship of an archaic kind [Chertok, 1984, p. 225]" and Erickson was

<sup>10</sup>While often therapeutically useful in the short-term, this is essentially a manic defensive process in the Kleinian sense, enabling a patient to feel elated by virtue of being permitted to not recognize and deal with the anxiety surrounding one's unconsciously destructive propensities and more hated parts of the self. Full maturation of the psyche and character structure requires considerable development beyond this phase.

unquestionably the master of such indirect communication (Erickson et al., 1976; Watzlawick, 1978). Kaiser (1965) reminds us that indirect communication reinforces patients' fusion fantasies by creating the illusion of being understood while denying patient-therapist separateness.

Erickson's unusual intonation resulted from arrhythmia and tone deafness, and produced a rhythm of speech totally unlike that of most Americans (Havens, 1985). Havens (1985) compared his speech patterns to Central African, Brazilian, and Peruvian tribes. His slow and emphatic style of talking was recently timed at a rate similar to that of a pregnant mother's heartbeat to her fetus, and, ironically, at the same 75 word-per-minute rate used by President Reagan when reading a speech, and a rabbi or priest reading scripture. DeMause<sup>11</sup> speculated that this slower rate, in contrast to the normal 150 words-per-minute, is associated with an earlier more atavistic, even symbiotic form of object relationship, perhaps unconsciously recalling the womb.

Erickson's wording typically utilizes "the patient's language" (see Erickson et al., 1976) and undoubtedly provides a narcissistically gratifying identification with a hypnotist felt to be inside one's own psychic system (Diamond, 1987). Similarly, adopting or mirroring a patient's posture or breathing and/or pacing a client by feeding back preconscious physiological responses further fosters the sense of the hypnotist's omniscience. Erickson's famed adage of "my voice will go with you" invites a bodily-level incorporation. Finally, his use of confusion renders patients more likely to respond to subsequent direction in order to bind anxiety. Thus, an archaic object relationship is recapitulated by an invoked regression to earlier, primary phases of cognitive processing, and in turn, Erickson provides a safe, "holding environment" (cf. Winnicott, 1965) for his now regressed patient.

Erickson's use of indirect communication, paradox, and the more evocative and experientially-near primary process language of puns, metaphors, and analogies, represents what Watzlawick (1978) termed "the language of change." Furthermore, as Kalt (1986) discussed, incorporation of therapeutic suggestion is maximized when the patient's secondary process level attempts to protect oneself by interfering with new meanings and possibilities that might otherwise reach the unconscious, are respected and utilized by the therapist. Erickson often attenuated such defensive interference by overly engaging and allying with his patient's secondary processes, and thus reduced patient interference with more symbolic primary process information. Such patterns are epitomized in Erickson's use of anecdotes and teaching tales, themselves conveying a *joie de vivre* and affirming many traditional American values, including common sense, pragmatism, self-sufficiency, resiliency, achievement, and clever wit (Diamond, 1983; Kirmayer, 1985, 1988). Erickson's role becomes that of a sage, teacher, or wise grandfather presenting lessons (i.e.,

<sup>11</sup>DeMause, L. Personal communication, 1985.

“teaching tales”) to his students. His use of metaphor in this context of serving as kindly grandfather or surrogate “Dutch uncle” recreates an archaic relational situation wherein adult-level defenses and secondary processes are realigned while Erickson the storyteller permits expression and oftentimes symbolic gratification of instinctual drives. This archaic recapitulation occurs as a result of the relaxing of defenses through metaphorical communication (cf. Schafer, 1983), in addition to the revival of opportunities for mastery within this safe and often enchanting context (cf. Bettelheim, 1977).

### *Concluding Thoughts and Implications*

Erickson's propensity for accessing archaic involvement, particularly in describing his own applied work, has contributed to the difficulty in unravelling his so-called “mystery.” Both his critics and admirers agree that he often engaged in “fanciful speculations” (McCue, 1984), even tending to “stretch the long-bow a little far” (Gibson, 1984). For example, McCue (1987) argued for wariness in taking his case reports at face value since, “there is reason to question the accuracy of Erickson's reporting of his clinical work [p. 10].” His writings are distinguished by little uncertainty and questioning, and as Bowers (1985) has noted, there is an absence of scientifically required intersubjectivity. In addition, several of his claims regarding the behavior of hypnotized subjects have not been successfully replicated (McCue, 1985). His clinical work has not been suitably compared with that of others; moreover, efforts to clarify Erickson's “essence” have tended to proceed rather solipsistically as though what is known to be essential to *any* therapeutic change process, namely a strong therapeutic alliance (Bordin, 1979; Hartley & Strupp, 1983), is secondary or irrelevant to Erickson's success. The trees are mistaken for the forest as the relational bedrock of Erickson's impact remains unexamined. Consequently, the clinical outcomes, values, and limitations of creating and utilizing archaic involvement are insufficiently understood.

A major heuristic purpose of the present article is to bring Erickson's work back into the mainstream of hypnosis and psychotherapy research. Several hypotheses have been proposed as to how Erickson specifically accessed the trance dimension of archaic involvement in order to produce hypnotic and therapeutic effects. The limited relationship between hypnotic capacity and long-term outcome of hypnotic treatment interventions (e.g., Wadden & Anderton, 1982) conceivably results from the failure to assess this dimension. Such archaic involvement appears to be a crucial moderator variable, which additionally, significantly contributes to Erickson's phenomenal success in brief therapeutic encounters, and arguably to more limited success (and even negative outcome) in his efforts toward characterological (i.e., structural) change.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>This is exemplified in examining the cases discussed by Erickson & Hill (1944). Transferences are kept positive and unresolved, and, consequently, there is little opportunity for patients to modulate negative (i.e., aggressive) affects nor to overcome arrests in self (i.e., narcissistic sphere) development.

Systematic research which studies the dynamic aspects of hypnotic interaction and employs phenomenologically oriented methodological advances is necessary to examine the effects of Erickson's hypnosis on the interactive hypnotic experience. These include Sheehan and McConkey's (1982) Experiential Analysis Technique (EAT); Baker's (1982) efforts to examine patients' mental representations of their hypnotherapists; Fromm and her co-workers' (Fromm, Brown, Hurt, Oberlander, Boxer, & Pfeifer, 1981) introspectively based "Chicago paradigm"; and Nash's (1984; Nash & Spinler, in press) Archaic Involvement Measure (AIM). Thus, the AIM could be administered subsequent to viewing an Erickson tape, a comparison tape of someone other than Erickson using selected indirect techniques, and a final comparison tape employing alternative procedures.

An essential question for clinicians concerns the long-term effects on the patient of the therapist's fostering such regressive involvement. There are both pluses and minuses of therapeutic relationships which maximize archaic involvement. Consequently, we need to empirically determine the efficacy of Ericksonian interventions both in offering short-term relief from suffering, and in potentiating developmental maturation in the long run. Not only must we ascertain *how much* archaic involvement is required for lasting change, but *what is done* with the regressive involvement (i. e., is it merely evoked, managed, utilized, or ultimately worked through?) is critical in assessing the value of Erickson's contribution.

Finally, we must begin to dispassionately investigate this "central core" and most human element of Erickson's hypnosis to insure that such interpersonal regression remains in the service of the patient's ego-development rather than becoming misused to serve the hypnotist's ego! Indeed, childish, idealizational mechanisms can be relinquished when we are prepared to see the amiable circus humbugs beneath our respected wizards — then, and only then, in an atmosphere devoid of canonization and purple-colored glasses, can the boundaries of Erickson's virtuosity be fully explored.

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Zugang zum archaischen Beteiligtsein: Auf dem Weg zur Lösung des Geheimnisses der Ericksonhypnose

Michael Jay Diamond

**Abstrakt:** Die "Essenz", die Milton Ericksons einzigartigem Stil und ungewöhnlichen, technischen Manövern unterliegt, liegt in seiner außerordentlichen Fähigkeit, das archaische Beteiligtsein aus seinen Patienten hervorzulocken. Archaisches Beteiligtsein, das durch perspektivenloses Überbewerten charakterisiert ist, ist in Amerikas beliebtem Märchen, *Der wunderbare Zauberer von Oz*, erklärt und wird benutzt, weitere Perspektiven zu erzeugen. Die Wichtigkeit solcher regressiven Objekt-Repräsentationen wird hervorgehoben. Ericksons unheimliche Fähigkeit, zum archaischen Beteiligtsein Zutritt zu finden und dadurch einen profunden Einfluß auf seine Klienten auszuüben, wird in seinen Begriffen analysiert: (a) Beziehungsstil; (b) therapeutische "persona"; (c) theoretische Orientierung und (d) spezifische Mikro-Techniken und Interventionen. Klinische Befunde, aus der Transkription eines Falles und Arbeiten auf Videoband hergeleitet, werden durchweg gebraucht, um zu beweisen, daß Erickson repressive, interpersönliche Verschiebungen begünstigt. Die Implikationen dieser Begabung werden diskutiert, und weitere Untersuchungswege werden vorgeschlagen.

L'accession à l'implication archaïque: vers une explication des mystères de l'hypnose ericksonienne

Michael Jay Diamond

**Résumé:** L'essence même du style unique de Milton Erickson et de ses manoeuvres techniques inusitées provient de son habileté peu commune à provoquer, chez le patient, une implication archaïque. Cette implication archaïque, qui se caractérise par un surinvestissement non-orienté de la personne de l'hypnotiseur, est expliquée et le conte folklorique américain Le Magicien d'Oz sert à en éclairer toute la portée. L'importance d'un

tel processus de régression dans la représentation d'objet est aussi soulignée. L'extraordinaire habileté d'Erickson d'accéder à cette implication archaïque chez son client et ainsi d'avoir une influence profonde sur lui est expliquée dans les termes suivants: a) style de relation, b) la "persona" thérapeutique, c) l'orientation théorique, et d) les micro-techniques spécifiques et les interventions. Des observations cliniques provenant de la transcription d'un cas et d'entrevues vidéo sont utilisées tout au cours de la démonstration, afin de supporter l'affirmation qu'Erickson encourage les transitions régressives dans la relation interpersonnelle.

**El compromiso primitivo: un intento de aclarar el misterio de la hipnosis ericksoniana**

**Michael Jay Diamond**

**Resumen:** La esencia subyacente al estilo único y a los artificios técnicos poco comunes utilizados por Milton Erickson, emanan de su inusual pericia en provocar lo que se ha dado en llamar el compromiso primitivo de los pacientes. Este compromiso primitivo está caracterizado por una sobreevaluación del terapeuta en la que se pierde la perspectiva de la realidad, esto es ilustrado por un cuento muy apreciado en América, "El maravilloso mago de Oz", el que es utilizado para evocar futuras perspectivas. Se hace notar la importancia de las representaciones de objeto regresivas. La misteriosa habilidad de Erickson para provocar un compromiso primitivo y de tal modo influenciar profundamente a su cliente es analizada teniendo en cuenta a) el estilo de la relación; b) la personalidad terapéutica; c) la orientación teórica y d) intervenciones y microtécnicas específicas. Se trabajó con los aportes clínicos obtenidos de un caso grabado en video, con el fin de verificar el argumento que sostiene que Erickson fomentó relaciones interpersonales de tipo regresivo. Se discuten las implicaciones de estas prácticas y se sugieren caminos a seguir en futuras investigaciones.