

**Daring to delight in other people**  
**Eurotas Conference, Moldavia, September 2013**

Good morning, everybody.

One of the main words in the title of this conference is “education”. I must say that it made me very happy when I saw it, because here we go, don't we all love it to educate other people? And now we have the official permission, even invitation, to do so for four full days.

For therapists in particular, this is such an opportunity. It is such a joy to help others on their way. With the years going by, most of us have certainly noticed how difficult it is to get your act together, to even change little details in the basic patterns which we started already in mama's belly. And now and here, we can do it with each other, we can educate each other mutually, what a feast!

So, this morning I am going to educate you regardless of your objections, and with a little luck then you are going to live what I am desperately struggling with. If you happen to get in touch with any resistance against my efforts to educate you, keep in mind, it's only for your best!

Now, seriously (and isn't education always a basically serious thing?), I would like, at the beginning, raise a question, which I think is an existential question for all people who work and live in the transpersonal field.

Say, you experience something a bit difficult in you life. And now, you have to deal with it. Isn't there alyways the big question, whether I shall go into living *what is*, (explore my thinking, my feelings, my body to find out *what is* )or whether I try to *change* it in one way or another.

In other words: when I feel “bad”, and then, after, say, a chakra meditation, I feel “better”, I have done something to my inner truth. I have changed it, modified it, kind of distorted it.

Equally, of course, if I then have a massage session, where I get *treated*, I ask somebody else to change *what is*. (The same, of course, if I go to any doctor or take some medicine.) Everything which makes me feel different without me engaging deeply into what is, everything which doesn't leave things as they are, *changes or camouflages my truth*.

Isn't that the big question, which in one way or another comes up in every therapy session? Or at least in every transpersonal therapy session?

There is certainly no easy answer to this dilemma. I have no doubt that most of us – with regard to this - live in a rather permanent rotten compromise (and I probably more than most of you).

This would mean that the most truthful way to live would be *to live with what is* – and nothing else.

So...in this spirit, I would like to propose to you now a likewise questionable enterprise. It is about *perceiving other people*. It is about the picture of others which we take in and carry around with us These might be people whom we meet for the first time or others whom we “have known since long” (as we like to say).

There are perhaps some amongst you who have walked much further on the spiritual path than the neurotic rest of us and who have come to perceive their neighbours only in a loving and appreciative way. For you, there is not much point in staying here, you will more or less waste your time and not learn anything new.

The same goes perhaps for those amongst you, who try *with a lot of effort* to love

other people. If you learned that you *should* love your neighbour and want to stick to this doctrine, you might be disappointed, if you stay.

I would first like to describe to you how, as a rule, our “normal” perception takes place, our normal neurotic perception of other people. Please keep in mind, when we go on, that perception of other people always has as background that we want or don't want/ should / must / will form a relationship with them – for five minutes or for five years. So this is, from the beginning on, an affair, where we are concerned about our own security to a rather high degree. It is especially about the security of our own identity, the security of *who we are and of who we want to remain*. Perhaps one could say that only people who are basically not worried anymore about the preservation of their identity, could be capable of *joyfully* looking forward to meeting other people. Because if you *do* worry in this regard, every other person is, of course, a potential danger to your carefully and painfully generated self image.

So what happens in these first moments of encounter is that we approach the other person quickly and cautiously with our *self made filters*, which are supposed to keep away any damage to the image which we have of ourselves. If I suddenly meet a snake in the middle of the desert, my filters help me to perceive the snake as a “dangerous being”. It belongs to my identity that I am somebody who should watch out for and run away from snakes. (As you know, there are some people who have, in this respect, a different self image and for whom, therefore, a snake does not present any danger.)

For me, however, my filters help me within seconds to perceive those aspects of the snake which turn it into a dangerous being. I make a selection, *my filters help me to perceive the other being selectively in a way which sustains my self image*. So one could say that in a way I *transform* the other person. I transform him or her, for instance, into a dangerous being.

The same happens, of course, if I come across a nice little house cat (and part of my self image is that I am a lover of cats): there too, I *select* certain aspects of the other being, which confirm me as “I”.

It is quite an upsetting fact, which is worth keeping in mind, again and again: each time you don't perceive the other from an extra-ordinary state of consciousness, you do it out of the need to conserve your self image. The other could confirm it or challenge it. Most of our attempts to make contact happen therefore in a framework of defence.

*You all know this thing: there are moments when you like and others when you dislike your partner. Please think of the person in your life to whom you feel the closest (better not your mother or father). Now, choose a situation in which you really love and like them. Take a very concrete one, please. (...)What is this person doing in this situation? (...)Now...does how the person is being or what they are doing agree with your own opinion about how life should be approached?*

*(...) Now, choose a situation, when you deeply dislike the same person (in case you still belong to the unenlightened rest of us). Don't handle it in abstract terms (like “I can't stand his narcissism”), but look, again, at a very concrete situation. What is the person doing? (...) And again: Does how the person is being or behaving agree with your own opinion about how life should be approached?*

So, this is the first step: we transform the other person according to our learned filters.

The second neurotically logical step in this process is that we *react to the*

*transformed object in an appropriate way* - “appropriate” according to our self fabricated yard stick. If I perceive a snake and I believe that I am afraid of snakes, then it would be “inappropriate” to behave as if I were brave and saucy and go over and caress its head. Because in this case, the snake will bite me. It does not fall for the show, but it responds to *what is* in me, to my truth - which is my fear.

The same happens *always* between people – I want to say: sooner or later - , since people need perhaps a little longer than snakes to respond to the truth. Sometimes it only happens after years, but the truth is always brought to the light – as much as we try to be nice or in any other way “appropriate”. This is a great annoyance and sadly tragic to those of us who try to be *better people* – better than they are. Of course, we then always encounter others with a profound ambivalence. We might have a deeply rooted mistrust on the one hand and a kind of fabricated love on the other. The other person responds *always* (sooner or later) to the mistrust. I call this the “law of ambivalence”. It explains, e.g., why in the field of many religious fundamentalists, who spend 24 hours a day in displaying forms of compulsive loving, there is always war. Sooner or later. And it also explains why Mary reacts in a rejecting way to Peter, who makes such an effort to be nice and prove to her that he is a wonderful guy. He wants her so badly, but, unfortunately, he also does not really like himself. He reaches out to her and, inside, he hesitates. And Mary reacts to the hesitation.

This is tragic. But on the soul level, it makes great sense. The soul wants Peter to get out of his ambivalence.

*I resume: the ordinary way of mechanical relating consists of two steps. With the first one, I form – by means of my filters and selection – an image of the other person. With the second, I react “appropriately” to the transformation I created.*

And see, there is a very interesting part at this point. Of course, I, in return, influence by my reaction the other person's “behaviour”. And this, then, very often in a way confirms my perception. Here we have an aspect of what it means to create your own reality.

I shall give you a trivial example. A few weeks ago, I was travelling to England and I spent the night in a small hotel in the French country side.

At the reception of the hotel, there was a young woman who welcomed me in a very French-rigid-charming-professional way. For the first ten minutes, she explained to me all the necessary details about the hotel, breakfast-time, restaurant reservation, room key etc. I immediately did not like her, because she tried so hard to be a good French hoteliere and competent and efficient and skilled and all the rest.

Now, of course, even though I did not say much, she noticed my “reserved” way of being, which inclined her to try even harder and become even more competent. Which, actually, made her more and more insecure, she made little mistakes, she lost her speech, searched for her words, turned red and got more and more into a mess. (I want to say here: I was not particularly haughty or arrogant, but kind of closedly reserved. But her professional facade was obviously not very strong.)

We got through this, and later, she served me at the table in the restaurant. I saw her more and more like a young girl from a middle class, small country town family who very much tried to be a good girl and perfect and do everything very well. And I could feel profoundly how much I had always disliked those ambitious good girls who are kind of dry and eager and reasonable and teacher's darling. They are so decent and prim and prudish. And good.

*And then, I decided to try something different.* I realised that I saw the worst in her and thereby reinforced the worst in her. What – I thought – if I decided to perceive other

aspects of her? There was not much at stake, I hardly knew her and would never see her again. It was more like a nice experiment to find out whether I could produce miracles, whether I could practise magic.

It was actually not very difficult. Rather soon, I could “get through” (in my perception) to the lively young woman in her who – I easily imagined – could be witty, intelligent, and nicely feminine. I could see her with her friends, young women and men of her age, and being quite entertaining, initiating, and humorous. In fact, I saw the very same woman and a completely different woman.

The next time she approached my table, I don't know what it was, but obviously, I looked at her differently. Perhaps my voice was different, and perhaps the words I said came out of a different mouth and heart. I was not terribly aware of all these subtleties, but, of course, she noticed *something*. I don't know how consciously she went through this. There was a transition time of surprise maybe, of hesitation, of confusion, but then, something clicked in her and with no doubt, she became more of the woman I had decided to see. The rest of the evening, we had quite a good time together, made funny little remarks, and at some point, she even told me something about the town she came from and where she had grown up. Nothing extraordinary, we did not become best friends or something like this. But we definitely had some good moments and laughs and some merry little conversations.

And I realised, I had produced a miracle.

The largest part of our perception of other people is in the sense I described earlier “mechanical”. You know perhaps that Gurdjieff permanently said to his pupils: “If you don't understand that you are nothing but mechanical beings you will never be able to make one single step on the way.”

This is a paradoxical intervention. The first step to open your heart is to realise that it is closed.

The first step in direction of a creative relationship is to realise that, almost always, my perception of the other (and my reaction to him or her) are mechanical.

A creative relationship in my understanding is a relationship in which both people again and again go with joy and anxiety beyond their self set limits. (Not all the time, but again and again.)

Perhaps one believes to be deeply alive, when one reacts in a heated, turmoiled, passionate or desperate way. But those are merely forms of behaviour which one has displayed many times before. They are part of the repertoire. Some mechanics are more passionate than others.

A little later on this trip to England, I spent 10 days or so with a very good friend. I have known her since ages and I like her very much. We went to Scotland together and, at some point on the second or third day, she said something critical to me, which hurt me. We were sitting in the car and I could literally feel how this thick curtain came down on me, which I have known before. It completely envelopes me and says to the other person: it would be better not to speak to me for the next thousand years.

So I sat there trying the usual thing. Find out how wrong she was to say something like this to me. What the unfinished thing was in her history which she had not worked through and therefore led her to make such a lousy remark to one of her best friends. This went on for some time. We did not speak, of course, and I kept wallowing in my wound and self-pity. Then, I suddenly remembered the miracle which I had produced in the French hotel, and I immediately wondered whether I could repeat it here and now. This was, of course, a different story.

The first obstacle was that I questioned myself whether I really wanted to

produce the miracle. It would mean that we would have a good time again and she would not be punished at all any longer for her misbehaviour. This was actually quite a rough challenge. I could see us just chatting along and laughing and enjoying Scotland together. This was what I had come here for. And it could be possible again. But would this not be denying my true deep feelings?

I *decided* that I'd rather wanted to have a good time than living in pain and misery for the next hours. I *decided* that I would go back to the good feelings I had had 20 minutes ago. I really wanted it.

And I noticed I could not. I – whoever “I” was and whoever it was who had felt alive and wonderful – I was obviously not in charge anymore. There was somebody else occupying the throne, and he was not willing to get out of his pouting and punishing – however much the other I wanted it.

This was a tough moment. I got quite angry with me and the fact that I was evidently not at all the master in my house. I had to spend my time in a deplorable and pitiful manner, even though I did not have the intention to stay there. Why could I only see my friend's hurtful behaviour and not all the other wonderful aspects for which I love her?

This was quite something. I really did not want to stay there. And I could not get out. Usually, in a situation like this, my way of handling it is “to speak out” and say my truth. Say what is going on with me. I know it works – not always, but often – but I kept thinking of the young woman in France and of my miracle and got really pissed that I could not deliver it here. To myself and just with myself. And besides, to go into “let me tell you what is going on in me” felt rather boring, time consuming and laborious.

And then, the second miracle on this trip happened. I had told myself that I was feeling what I was feeling and that I obviously could not change it. But at the same time, I had wanted more than anything else to use any bridge, gimmick, trick, ladder which would offer itself so that I would get into a more open space within myself. And shortly after I had decided this – here comes the miracle – *she* made this little remark about something in the landscape. Some carefully fabricated astonishment about so many tiny lakes being in Scotland or something. And I immediately thought this is one of her wonderful traits (and I could feel it). She does not stay stuck, she opens little doors. She is easily ready for gentleness without camouflaging anything. She knew, of course, that something was going on, and she offered the lakes of Scotland. I took up the opportunity as I had promised myself and responded directly. Five minutes later, we were back into being friends, with the little delicacy of mutual recognition and acknowledgement. There were some fragile moments of transition, but then, everything was fine.

I had *decided* to see that more essential side in her rather than her defence system. It brought up in me my more essential aspects rather than my defence. For this, I had to very much *want* to get beyond my mechanical structure.

So, I guess, there are several steps. The first one is to realise that your perception is most of the time rather mechanical. Especially, when you have been hurt or criticised. But even in general, we don't like to think of our ways of perceiving the world and other people as mechanical. We have worked on ourselves, we have discovered many former unknown layers in us... When we look at other people, we do do it with respect and mindfulness. Projection is a word we have heard of and worked through, but most of our perception is free of it.

Well, I don't know, this might be true for you, it is certainly not true for me. I have sometimes become horrified when I just discover how I see people in the street or a restaurant, particularly, when I am in a bad mood. It's just not believable.

*So, I would like to do a dumb little exercise with you – or rather propose that you do it just by yourself. Nobody is going to inquire you later about the results, it is just for you. Please look around the room and find yourself stopping and perceiving 5 or 6 people who catch for what ever reason your attention. And then, very quickly, just notice what you think about them, how and what you perceive about them.*

I don't know how much knowledge you have in the field of magic.

What defines a magician or a witch?

They create a situation such as they would like to have it. They get what they want. Which distinguishes them from mechanical beings. (Those mostly get what they try to avoid.)

Why is this different with magicians? Why do they get what they want?

Well, the answer is obvious: because they have magical powers.

The only question which remains then is: what are magical powers? Once you found out, all you have to do, is apply them.

So how do we start. Perhaps the main most important thing is to first find a way how to *create a pause in the habitual order of mechanics.*

*Could you just do this little thing: your neighbour will, in a minute, say something to you – anything – and would you, please, respond in a not mechanical way.*

(...)

The point is *not* to respond in an especially eccentric or outrageous way, but to stop your own mechanics, to pause, to create a still point, so to speak. There is always an interdependency between the perceiver and perceived object, as you know. If therefore, you allow yourself (as the perceiver) to get into a non mechanical attitude, then, what you perceive, will also change.

Your body is principally in a habitual muscular basic tension (shoulders, forehead, thighs, etc.). There is hardly anybody who does not live with this continuous tension, even if you think of yourself as a pretty relaxed person. Of course, the muscular state which your body is in, plays an important role in how and what you perceive. Therefore, if you can change this physical base of yours in a meaningful way, your manner of seeing things and people will also change.

*Why don't you close your eyes for a moment and imagine your whole body as a coherent and energetic flowing field (which it actually is). Don't concentrate so much on bones and muscles. Perhaps you can even allow that the picture of your habitual body shape (with head, arms, legs, etc.) expands into a three dimensional energy field with disintegrated borders. Just let everything go. The muscles of your body and the image of your body.*

*And then open slowly your eyes and be aware whether you perceive the world in any little (or big) way differently from usual. (...)*

You don't have to make a big fuss about it, you want it to become a daily and easy process. Gradually, you'd want to be able to get yourself into this not-so-ordinary perceiver position at any given moment, because if you can do it only at spiritual conferences or in therapy groups, it will again become part of your personal mechanics .

This form of physical energetic interruption of your mechanics is *one possibility.*

There might be many others. The point is to get yourself, the perceiver, into a greater awakensness and thereby a greater spectrum of choice, when you are now going to perceive another person. If you are not able to create any wellbeing in your body, try at least to get in contact. Talk to yourself.

You can only practice magic, if it's not your comparatively petty and small-minded ego-needs which determine your perception. And, of course, this requires a little time of practice in the arts of magic.

*Now, think (again) of the person to whom you feel especially close. Ask yourself the following question: What would an extremely gifted magician, whose aim is not his or her own security, but to bring out the radiant, brilliant, delicious aspects in others – what would attract such a magician's attention now, when he/she looks at this person?*

Yes, strange as it sounds, but the well being of the other is *at least* as important to a magician as their own one, often *more* important. And this not out of a helper neurosis. Or out of Sunday School Christianity. Or compulsive Bodhisattva holiness. But out of real love.

This is rather incredible, but it exists. They would therefore, e.g., if they were married and had a heavy fight with their partner, be very concerned about the happiness of their partner. Right in the middle of the fight.

Or, say, in an expert discussion about education and spirituality, they would do everything in order to bring out the best and the most luminous in their discussion partners.

Insofar, you understand, they would – in the spectrum of their perception – not at all be interested in noticing aspects in the other person, which might endanger their own sense of identity, their own status, their own reputation. It would be much more interesting for them to perceive the aspect of the other which would let him or her appear most radiant.

And they would like to have this in the very moment. Just now in this situation. Not in abstract, not “in principal”, but now, in this instant, while we are speaking. They would like to help your radiance come out right now in this present communication, not when they think about you at home in their sitting room.

It would be a creative act.

A creative act in a double sense. One: the perceiver would see something in the other which is perhaps buried under a layer of mechanical behaviour and waiting to be noticed. *And:* he or she would create magical powers in themselves, powers which are, of course, extremely enriching and fulfilling for their own life.

Actually, it is completely incomprehensible – and a visitor from another planet would be disgusted or smile compassionately (depending on the planet) that we do not live like this *all the time*, but rather in our usual defensive, hostile and fearful way.

With this, I have almost come to the end of my talk. You are perhaps asking yourself whether it would be difficult to perceive those “radiant” aspects in others (particularly when you hardly know the person – *or*, the same, when you have known them for ten years or so).

I think, it is infinitely simple and easy. You need perhaps a little training in magic, but it is in no way a big deal. Everybody can do it. The only, but indispensable condition is *that you'd want to bring to life the magician in you.*

And this, too, is actually no tremendous thing.

The crucial point is really and only, whether you want it.

And there we are, it seems that there are still a lot of good reasons (on our planet) which speak against wanting it. Speak against wanting to become a magician and mainly celebrate the essence in your partners, friends, and colleagues. Rather than being very much aware of their short comings and weaknesses.

*Please, for a minute or so, come to an agreement with your neighbour, whether you consider to want it. And remember, you could still say – as I pointed out in the beginning – that this whole thing is a very questionable affair. And then you'd better leave your hands off it.*

(...)

*However, just in case that you – with your neighbour in mind – would like to go for it, then, please, close your eyes again for a moment..., let yourself be comfortable, pleasant in you body..., forget who you are and what you believe in..., feel your body as a wide, flowing field...And then open your eyes now and look at your neighbour...do it easily, without incense ...And then just see with the help of your magical powers this luminous, essential aspect in the other person, in your neighbour.*

*And now tell him or her what you see.*

So, basically, one could do this with everybody one meets. However, as I said, the truly crucial question is, whether one wants it.

And that is really not an easy one.

Thank you for going with me.