




METAPHORS OF

Movement



METAPHORS OF Movement

What is 'Metaphors of Movement'?

Metaphors of Movement is the study of the symbolism and structure of autogenic metaphor and their influence upon reasoning processes. Autogenic metaphors are the metaphors that naturally arise in the language and communication of individuals that may, or may not be shared by other people. Metaphors of Movement primarily concerns itself with metaphors that indicate movement, or lack thereof, and so has its greatest application in the remedy of "stuck states."

A Definition of a Stuck State

A stuck state is a common problem presented to psychotherapy and involves a lack of ability in one or more of four main areas.

- The direction in which the person is moving in life ("Where am I going?")
- The distance they are travelling ("I've got such a long way to go!")
- The mode of travel ("What steps do I need to take?")
- The rate of travel ("Am I making much progress?")



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It has been an observation that a lot of therapy involves reframing the client's problem so that it better fits the therapeutic metaphor that is held sacred by the therapist. For example, imagine a client goes to each of the following therapists: energy worker, NLP practitioner, psychoanalyst, psychiatrist.

Each of these professionals has their own metaphoric paradigm in which they operate and will frame and reframe the client's communication so that it fits this paradigm.

In all cases here, things are exaggerated for effect:

Example 1. Energy Worker

Metaphoric Structure: plumbing

Client: "I do not feel like my life is going anywhere."

Energy Worker: "This is a common reaction when the energy doesn't flow through your meridians correctly. As the energy gets blocked the flow can become sluggish, and this will make you feel sluggish as well."

Example 2. NLP Practitioner

Metaphoric Structure: computer programming

Client: "I do not feel like my life is going anywhere."

NLP Practitioner: "Your mind is like a computer, and you do not feel like you are going anywhere because of the programs you are running in your brain. NLP can reprogram your mind and we can delete that limiting belief of yours and install a new and more empowering belief."

Example 3. Psychoanalyst

Metaphoric Structure: archeology

Client: "I do not feel that my life is going anywhere."

Psychoanalyst: "We need to dig down into your past to uncover how this started."

Example 4. Psychiatrist

Metaphoric Structure: Balancing chemistry

Client: "I do not feel that my life is going anywhere."

Psychiatrist: "This could be a sign of a clinical depression where the brain chemistry is out of balance. If necessary this can be corrected with medication."



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What we can find is that operant metaphoric structure serves the therapist as an explanation of the solution. These operant metaphors are how therapists reach a sense of understanding and self empowerment in order to work with other people. These operant metaphors produce a sense of certainty. Thus the same client can visit a dozen therapists, each from a different therapeutic discipline and each therapist will have a radically different concept of the client than the others.

But the recurring and consistent feature is that the client's own operant metaphor, i.e. the autogenic metaphors, are generally ignored, or are not even heard in the first place. The client may as well be shouting at the deaf, for all the good it does them to try and get their therapist to actually hear them. Therapists hear, but they rarely actually listen. and when they listen, they rarely understand what was spoken. For them, understanding becomes an imposition against which the client is powerless.

The Problem of Suffering

All too often in counselling and therapy, the sessions will consist of little more than exploring the client's model of suffering with the hope of offering a panacea. A panacea doesn't change anything, it just makes it a little more tolerable.

By the end of the therapy, the client has a better model and better set of distinctions by which they understand their suffering.

They may have more words and be more articulate in their description and thus are better able to explain how they feel and how they suffer. For example, they have learned that they have "blocked energies" or "a chemical imbalance" and so forth.

But they don't necessarily suffer less. They simply learn to suffer it better.

If the person is exposed to a diagnosing clinician, they may well explain their suffering in phrases and terms that fit diagnostic models and so emerge with a name for their suffering – a label, a diagnosis. Suitably armed with a diagnosis, this diagnostic frame can be cross-matched against prescription protocols, so the appropriate medicament or therapeutic process can be prescribed with the hope of providing some relief.



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When this process is applied to behaviour or to psychological and emotion suffering, what this translates to is very simple:

The client is entirely passive and does not need to do anything different in order to be healed. The relief comes not through a change in behaviour, but rather in being able to describe their pain properly and then to take the appropriate medication.

Most contemporary therapy involves an exploration of four common themes:

- Emotional responses to the problem (how we feel about what happens)
- The consequences of the problem (the effect of what happens)
- Examples of the problem (what happens)
- The diagnosis of the problem (cause and effect relationship and what we call it)

But here's the thing - all of these are explorations of what the problem is not.

Let me explain. Imagine I hold in my hand a nice shiny new pen.

- I could tell you how I feel about the pen. But this isn't anything to do with the pen, only my feelings towards it.
- I could tell you about the consequences of having or not having a pen. But this doesn't tell you anything about this pen.
- I could give you examples of pens. But that doesn't tell you about the pen that I am holding.
- I could give you the reason that pens exist. But that doesn't tell you about this pen in my hand.

This then is the realm of so many therapeutic methods - a discussion of everything that isn't the problem.



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In NLP we might see things reduced down to "belief busting", "swish patterns", "double dissociation" which may account of the attitude that is prevalent in some NLP schools. The techniques taught to some NLP students serve only to create a mental disregard for the structure of the problem. In an attempt at perfecting Korzybski's map, some people seem to forget entirely about the actual territory.

For example, when a client is 'bashing his head against a brick wall' the NLP trainees will facilitate a denial of that wall, "just make it smaller and further away" commands the NLPer in his enthusiasm to create a measurable change. Thus the client no longer possesses a representation against which to bash his head.

In Metaphors of Movement the wall is left alone. Even the laziest mind should be able to comprehend that it is not the wall that is the problem, but rather it is the behavioural strategy by which the client is dealing with the wall that is the problem. In Metaphors of Movement it is the person that changes, not the representation.

When a man walks into a door and utters, "Stupid door!" we don't advise him to get rid of the door. Yet in the world of NLP this seems to be a regrettably common practice.

Metaphors of Movement work aims to explore an entirely different area than that of human misery; it aims to strategically transform the fundamental coping behaviours inherent in the client's behavioural system.

The work does this by:

- Connecting the client to behaviours that commonly occur outside of their conscious awareness
- Exploring the mental landscape ("the map")
- Examining the coping behaviours employed within this mental map
- Testing the effectiveness of these behaviours in the real world ("the territory")
- Designing and teaching more suitable behaviours to be applied in the client's map and territory



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Measuring Change Kinaesthetically (Creating Kinaesthetic Denial)

There comes a time in many brief therapy sessions where the therapist turns to the client and asks, "So how do you feel when you think about the problem now?" The difficulty of measuring changes kinaesthetically is that kinaesthetic change is not a reliable indicator of anything actually happening. To give an extreme example. A person goes to a coach to learn the "millionaire mindset" that is quite the fashion at this moment in time. By the end of the session, the client may well feel more positive about money, but at that precise moment, nothing has actually happened in the external real world. He isn't actually any wealthier. He might not even possess the "millionaire mindset" - he just feels better.

And the same thing can happen with therapy. The client arrives a bit tense, maybe emotional, and having talked about it for an hour or so begins to feel a bit better. But this doesn't necessarily translate into anything that is actionable. In fact it might even have the opposite effect and now the client loses motivation to take any action about the problems in their lives, simply because they no longer feel like problems.

Many problems are more than simply emotions. Problems exist out there in the real world and are not going to go away simply because a person has learned to experience a kinaesthetic denial of them.

I have often wondered if this explains why so many exposed to certain schools of NLP find that their lives start falling apart as they fall into debt, suffer relationship breakdowns and struggle to find meaningful employment. Yet throughout this, a certain zeal for thinking of oneself as truly successful seems to persist as an extra-ordinary capacity for cognitive dissonance develops. This is kinaesthetic denial in action.



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Metaphoric Taxonomy

Fortunately there exists a taxonomy to the structure of metaphor, a study of which is now central to the Metaphors of Movement training. Awareness of this taxonomy can mean that metaphor acts as a magic mirror in which the very structure of our reasoning is laid bare.

What follows here are just some examples of metaphor taxonomy. It is beyond the scope of this document to explain or justify the conclusion of exactly why, say, a container metaphor suggests something has existed since childhood or a metaphor of injury pertains to relationships. Some may disagree and wish for a debate on this issue. I invite people to please post their reasonings on the Metaphors of Movement forum here:
<http://forum.metaphorsofmovement.co.uk/spartforum>



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The Containers (Container Metaphors)

Typical examples: "I'm stuck in a rut", "I'm trapped in a prison of my own making", "I'm in the pit of despair"

Indicates: Most commonly reflecting issues from childhood

Structure: Possesses a binary structure. A person is either in the container or out of the container.

Function: Serves as a protective prison

Effect: Limits movement

Origin: Reflects issues of immaturity

Solution: Requires growth and have a rapid resolution

The Hurts (Emotional Injury Metaphors)

Typical examples: "I'm broken hearted", "I feel stabbed in the back", "I'm hurting so bad."

Indicates: Most commonly reflects relationship issues

Structure: Possess an analogical structure. They occur across a broad spectrum.

Function: Acts as a warning signal about other people's behaviour

Effect: Do not necessarily limit movement

Origin: Reflects issues of identity

Solution: Requires recovery and healing time

The Burdens (Carried Object Metaphors)

Typical examples: "The burden of guilt," "Its like an albatross around my neck," "Carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders."

Indicates: Most commonly reflects duties and responsibilities

Structure: Possesses both digital (i.e. carried or not carried) and analogical structure (i.e. size and weight)

Function: Serves to keep the person down to earth and grounded

Effect: Reduces movement

Origin: Reflects familial and cultural traits

Solution: Requires difficult choices to be made and have rapid resolution



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The Fulfilments (Containers Carried in the Body)

Typical examples: "I feel empty inside", "I'm boiling with rage", "I have so much love to give."

Indicates: Most commonly reflect emotional transactions between people

Structure: Possesses analogical structure

Function: Acts as a currency between people for emotional trading

Effect: Do not affect movement but will influence direction

Origin: Reflects emotional needs from adolescence

Solution: Requires attention to other people

The Attachments (Restrains, Ties and Bind Metaphors)

Typical examples: "Something holds me back", "I'm tied to this", "My wife is like a ball and chain to me"

Indicates: Most commonly reflect bonds to people, objects, things and places

Structure: Possesses either digital or analogical structure

Function: Acts as non-negotiable bonds between people and people and things.

Effect: Greatly limits or prevents movement

Origin: Reflects non-negotiable attachments

Solution: Requires growth, adaptation or breaking free

The Immersions (Immersion in Fluid Metaphors)

Typical examples: "I'm in deep water", "I'm in the shit" , "It's like I'm wading through treacle."

Indicates: Most commonly reflects ongoing real world experience and difficulties

Structure: Have an analogical structure

Function: Acts as an environment through which one must navigate successfully

Effect: Are about the present time

Origin: Reflects situational circumstances

Solution: Requires effort, endurance and creative thinking



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Examples from Experimental Practice



Look at this poor chap

Container Metaphor - “A Chronic Depression”

A chronically depressed alcoholic presents himself for therapy. His physical appearance is congruent with this diagnosis. Smelling of last night's alcohol, looking somewhat dishevelled and unkempt he tells the therapist that he is really depressed and that it is like “the pit of despair.”

“The pit of despair” is a container metaphor and has a binary structure to it. You are either in it, or you are not in it. The pit of despair is only really a problem if you are in it, and much less of a problem if you are not in it.

Imagine a really big bucket. You are either in the bucket, or you are not in the bucket. Some smartarse will of course claim that you can sit on the edge of the bucket and dangle your feet into it. This takes us into “edge metaphors” which are outside of the scope of what we are covering here. But just in case you wondered, “edges” are about transitional time-based events. So there.



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Container metaphors take a variety of themes. Some are all encompassing; for example they may be a prison cell or cage. These are quite common. Other containers are open, but not usually in a convenient way. For example, "The pit of despair" that is open at the top, but the top is too far above the hapless soul that is stuck in there. He's in deep. Really deep.

There are a number of effects that a container metaphor has upon the person.

- they cannot go anywhere, they are trapped
- they may be cut off from everyone else
- people who are involved in a relationship with them either have to deal with the barrier between them or must join them inside the container.
- the container also offers a protection from the outside world. It's a "safe prison."

What can we tell about his experience?

- he isn't going anywhere.
- he is very low
- he is helpless in this situation
- he's down
- he's alone
- he is beneath everyone else
- it is as if the earth has swallowed him up
- he's in the dark
- he's climbing the walls
- he bounces off the walls
- he's trapped
- he's at rock bottom

This is the man who goes to his doctor and reports these things, and the doctor correctly identifies that the man is in a depression (i.e. a pit), but the doctor may not mean the same thing by this word as I might.

Now, forensically, we can infer a number of things about this man's situation.

Container metaphors typically embody childhood experiences and the boundaries that are placed around us early in life; they offer protection of status. For example, mother may wrap you up in cotton wool. She likes you just the way you are and will take action to keep you just the same.



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So regarding our man in the pit. We can examine a little history by asking ourselves how he got in there. A common response from trainees is, "he dug himself a big hole" but in practice people rarely do this. This is an incorrect value judgement that is placed upon the man's situation. Just because we make him responsible for his solution, doesn't mean he is responsible for the creation of the problem.

It might be right though if this man shows himself to be highly analytical. i.e. a man who digs deeply into a subject and a man who wants to get to the bottom of everything. It happens of course, but a pit of despair is not the usual outcome of such an activity.

A give away might be to ask the man what he wants as an outcome. He may say something like, "I want to get to the bottom of this depression" in which your suspicion might be correct. But this doesn't usually happen. Usually it is Coco-The-Therapist who digs deep using the analytical approach and they start the archaeological excavation into the psyche of their client. Subsequently Coco is then left philosophising why these patients tend to deteriorate over the course of their "treatment" as they seem to get ever deeper into their depression.

In practice the man is more likely to give us a direction of movement which is an extension of where he was going when he ended up in the pit in the first place. Something like, "I want to move my life forward."

So, if we examine this particular pit, we can see it has steep sides and has quite a drop. The transition from moving forwards to being into the pit was a quick one. It wasn't a slippery slope, or a gradual decline, it was a rapid fall.

Thus: so far we have:

- This man's entry into the pit of despair was a dramatic and sudden one.
- It occurred early in life.



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Now, there is more that we can infer. Container metaphors convey a type of status. For example, more than one client who has been trapped in a cage will report that the cage is made of gold when asked about its material construction. This gives a very different status image than a cage that is made of rusted scrap metal.

But there is also the status that pertains to elevation. For example, imagine a person on the proverbial pedestal. They are in an elevated, if somewhat vulnerable, position.

Essentially, going up implies increased status, going down implies decreased status.

For example:

- Going up in the world
- Social climbing
- Going up the career ladder
- Top dog
- The head of an organisation

- Going down in the world
- Socially descending
- Going down the career ladder
- Bottom dog
- At the bottom of an organisation

With the man in the pit of despair, there has been a loss of elevation. He has dropped below the baseline of ground level.

Thus, we have:

- the man's entry into the pit of despair was a sudden and dramatic one
- it occurred early in the man's life
- it involved a dramatic loss of status



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We also know from the metaphor that this has isolated him from other people (because there is no one else in the pit with him) and has probably affected his relationships dramatically. He also is in a situation where he hasn't moved his life on since that event. He might be a difficult guy to reach.

It is possible that some people have tried to reach him and be with him, but he just pulled them down to his level. A relationship with this man would require either looking down and talking down to him, or getting down to his level. In his experience both situations were true and he sought out the company of fellow drunks.

Now for the good news. Earlier in this section I wrote that container metaphors have a binary structure. In the Metaphors of Movement remedial work, the resolution to a situation like this is really rapid, despite the lengthy duration of the existent suffering. A long recovery time is not required as there is a pattern by which we can enable him to get out of the pit. That's the easy part.

Now what will often happen is that there is an adaptation period that is required because the person will find themselves in a new metaphorical environment to which they will need to orientate. Having been isolated for so long, they may be somewhat vulnerable. This is when the therapeutic work really begins. It's called learning to live out there in the world.



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Immersion Metaphor - “Marital crisis”



Poor lady. Her husband's indiscretion had just come to light and this had put the marriage into serious jeopardy. "I feel like I'm drowning" she sobbed. So I enquired further into this, "Drowning in what exactly?" Fortunately, it was just an ocean of water that stretched as far as the eye could see in every direction. Sometimes people aren't so lucky. There are many substances in which one might drown. For example, treacle or molasses are quite common ("A sweet but sticky situation", "I'm completely stuck") and so is sewage and excrement ("A really shitty situation").

Immersion metaphors generally reflect real-world ongoing experience that cannot be avoided or run away from. This is something that they have no choice but to go through and hopefully they will get through it in one piece.

So, our lady is in an ocean that stretches as far as the eye can see in every direction. No sight of land anywhere. But she is not alone.

"I'm trying to keep my family afloat" she says and she gestures with both hands as though she is juggling. She tells me that metaphorically she has a child in each hand and is trying to keep them above the waves. Her husband was no where to be seen.

So with just this information, we can start to infer a lot of information about her situation.



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For example:

- she feel cast off, abandoned
- she is lacking support
- she has lost her buoyancy
- she is no longer grounded
- she is all at sea
- she risks going under
- she is trying to keep her head above water
- she is drifting, going with the flow?

This last one triggered a reaction in her. "No, no!" she said, "I'm trying to go against the flow!"

So now we have a lot more information. We can ask her, "Where are you trying to get to?" The answer is fairly inevitable. She is trying to get back to where she was before this thing swept her off her feet and she lost all control of where her life was headed.

Up until this point she was happy to go with the flow, be swept along with it all and she wasn't paying attention to where she was going until it was too late, and now without even noticing she is cut off from everything she knew and is lost. And now there was the possibility of a storm brewing.

Swimming against the tide to try and get back to where she came from is a huge undertaking and not one that is likely to succeed, especially as she tries to keep her family afloat at the same time.

Eventually she will either drown or end up somewhere she never intended. Washed up, on the rocks, abandoned. Maybe she had been hoping to be carried off to paradise, but paradise has been lost.



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To the keen eye this may appear to be a situation that is without an easy remedy. That is because that is exactly what it is. A swish pattern or 6 step reframe isn't going to change very much here.

Her current solution is to try top reverse the way that she got into the situation in the first place. This is unlikely to prove to be productive. This is The Erroneous Law of Opposites – this Law states that if something is a problem, then the opposite of it will be the solution. This Law is Erroneous.

So I asked her, "How deep is this water?"

She stopped crying in an instant and looked at her feet and blushed. She hadn't thought about that before. I hear this a lot.

It turns out that the flowing water in which she was struggling to swim was only knee deep.

Thus a paradigm shift can occur.

- she needs to take a stand
- she can stand up for herself
- she can find a different type of support and put her foot down on a few things
- she can decide what steps she needs to take
- her children are allowed to stand up for themselves as well

This created a radical change in how she experienced her relationship (they are still together 6 years later). Previously, having been swept off her feet, she was happy to go with the flow and she'd got caught up in it all. But she had failed to notice that her husband was no longer in this flow. She'd been floating around in an easy going manner for a long time but hadn't paid attention to the fact that her husband was no longer with her. He was elsewhere and with someone else.

She recognised that this passive "floating" role was common to her relationships with the majority of people. She also noticed that the entire thing was rather shallow and lacked any real depth.

No easy change here though, she is going to have to wade through quite a lot in order to get to a place where she is high and dry again.



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A Shitty Situation - A combination of container and immersion.



It promised to be an interesting afternoon. Standing at the office door in tears, she entered the room and declared, "I don't want to talk about it!" Not the best words for a therapist to hear but none-the-less I told her, "That is fine, don't tell me anything about it. Just tell me what it is like."

Gesturing to her throat, she said, "It's like I'm up to here in the shit!"

"What kind of shit?" I asked her.

"All the shit that other people throw at me." She said.

And right there we have more information that we could possibly want. But anyway, I asked her, "how do you deal with this situation?" to which she replied, "I keep my mouth shut and wait for things to get better."

Here's what we know:

- her life stinks
- she is an easy target
- she is in the firing line
- she is surrounded by a lot of shit
- it's a really shitty situation



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Essentially, she is the target of a lot of shit that is produced by other people. Forensically, we can begin to infer a number of things. The shit serves as a container, so we know that this has been going on for a long time, i.e. since some time in childhood, and it is also an immersion, so we know that some aspects of this are quite unavoidable.

So, what makes her such an easy target? If her strategy for coping with this situation is to passively keep her mouth shut and wait, we can assume that she is at a standstill and doesn't move out of the way.

We also know a lot about her relationships with others.

- people probably avoid her and stay away from her
- metaphorically speaking she's dirty, she stinks
- she takes a lot of shit from other people

If this has been going on for most of her adult life, there is a high probability that there is an issue of an identity role. This is a role that she has assumed and doesn't realise is something that can be changed. i.e. she has learned to stand her ground, no matter what the consequences.

A quick aside. There was a strange child in one of my classes at school who had a predilection for shitting on the floor and then flicking it around the room. Needless to say, this was just one of the very long list of things I hated about school. But anyway, he'd typically do this during English class and once the shit started to fly the classroom would empty in seconds. Kids would be almost crushing each other in their haste to get out of there. Only the fact that this occurred on the second floor did it prevent kids from fleeing out of the windows. I can imagine if this lady had been present wouldn't have done this. She would have been the one to stand her ground and demand that the child change his behaviour. Admirable, for sure, but not something I would have done. Actually, it was around about this time that I started to sit nearest the door whenever possible so I'd be the first one out.



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A consequence of this is that she may be unwilling to change her position. It would certainly take a special kind of stubbornness to put up with what she has to put up with. I don't imagine that she would have too many friends – well, apart from the people who would use her as a human shield.

It may be the position that she adopts with other people that makes her such a target. A passive strategy would suggest that she is waiting for others to change their behaviour as she is unwilling or unable to change her own behaviour and position. For her, there is going to be a very strong principle at stake.

But at least everyone knows exactly where she stands.

And she inevitably stands alone. A relationship for this woman will get very messy very quickly.

The question for her is about whether she is willing to change her position.



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Environmental Metaphors - The Man at the North Pole



Presented during a workshop, a participant told us the following and we knew nothing else about him but this small piece of information. "It's like I'm standing out in an ice field at the North Pole. Nothing but ice and snow in every direction. Everything is white."

As with all metaphor, the information given is very dense information, it takes a bit of time to work through the variables:

- this guy thinks of himself as someone who is out standing in his field
- he's the cool guy
- he's probably quite cold
- he's isolated and very much a loner
- it's hard work to get close to this guy
- he thinks of himself as some kind of explorer

Now, he's on the North Pole, not the South Pole. Possibly a status issue here - i.e. he is on top of the world, he has the world at his feet.

He may think about changing his position, but he gets cold feet and doesn't take the necessary steps. He might find himself frozen to the spot.



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He's standing in a field. Out standing. This also suggests that he is the outsider. Whilst he is very down to earth, he doesn't play too well with others...or he doesn't want to. That is all beneath him (status) or simply isn't cool enough for him (a different type of status).

His romantic relationships might be interesting. He might behave in a really cool or cold manner. To cope with him his partner might need to be an ice-queen with a cold heart, or be prepared to get a cool reception to her emotional advances.

There is a high probability that he sees everything in terms of black and white and there isn't much in between the two.

Getting to where he is today (i.e. the North Pole ice fields) has been quite a journey for him to undertake. This is probably as far as he is able to go, it is time for the prodigal son to return.

Summary

Metaphors of Movement is a developing field that has captured the attention of many people involved in therapy, NLP and business. It provides a number of forensic tools that enable communicators to offer effective analysis of information that commonly occur outside of normal awareness. Metaphors of Movement training is split into 11 levels. At the time of writing only levels 1 and 2 are being taught over a 2 or 4 day period. To learn more about where an MoM training is being held near you, please see:

<http://metaphorsofmovement.co.uk/training-workshops/>

A side project, "The Movement" is designed as a creative outlet for those involved in the development of Metaphors of Movement details of which can be found on the Metaphors of Movement website here: <http://metaphorsofmovement.co.uk/the-movement/>



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