A Complete Guide To Therapy
From Psychoanalysis To Behavior Modification

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of thought’? In other words, for all your qualifications about this therapy promoting enthrallment or that therapy being dehumanizing, are they not all pretty much conformist by virtue of being Therapy itself?

These are valid questions, but we'll need a wider perspective if we are to deal with them. For this purpose we have reserved our final chapter.

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Hysterical Misery
And Common Unhappiness

There is no question that therapy as an institution has to stand within bourgeois society. If neurosis is a splitting within the self, and healing consists of some degree of reunification tendered by therapists who have to live in the real world, then the product will have to stand within the given, bourgeois order of things.

But as such, the proposition is not a very interesting one; since all institutions, even the most revolutionary, have to connect with the social order to which they refer. Marx himself was the foremost exponent of this view. In his system any new order is born out of the actual contradictions within the old. Marx held that no revolution can be grafted onto a society from without; and the seeming novelty of revolutionary ideas like Marx's—and Freud's—only reflect the depth within the social order at which they were discovered and the alienation—or repression—which had hidden them from view.

So the broad social significance of therapy is not a matter of whether it is part of the bourgeois world but, rather, which side of that world's contradictions it takes. In other words, does therapy move people in a progressive direction or does it further stagnation, conformity or even reaction? Admittedly, these categories are exceedingly difficult to define in any case; and when they have to be related to something as haphazard and poorly delineated as the therapies, the problems seem virtually limitless.

One starts with the clear understanding that in actual practice every therapeutic modality can be used in a number of political directions and can play a great variety of roles in social life. Bearing the above in mind, it might yet be possible to cast a little...
light. Let us begin by defining four main ideologies concerning the politics of therapy.

The first is that of Freud. It became the credo of psychoanalysis in general and has been endlessly restated, but never so clearly as in its initial formulation. At the threshold of his psychoanalytic discoveries, Freud depicted an imaginary dialogue with a patient who protested, “You tell me yourself that my illness is probably connected with my circumstances and the events of my life. How do you propose to help me, then?” To which Freud replied, “You will be able to convince yourself that much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. With a mental life that has been restored to health you will be better armed against that unhappiness.” In short, Freud proposed bracketing out the events of real life, which had undoubtedly played a role in creating the neurosis. Bracketing here meant taking into account but with a certain suspension of judgment. The analyst was neither to interfere nor judge but only to interpret and facilitate the patient’s self-formative process. Meanwhile the world, whether it be the family or the state, was allowed to go its own way.

The second ideology proposes to deal with real circumstances as they immediately effect the individual, but to make no pronouncements about the general societal matrix in which they occur. Included here would be the great body of supportive or relational psychotherapies, much family therapy, symptom-oriented behavior therapy (including sex therapy) and so forth.

The third ideology extends the second by adding a positive pronouncement in which the therapy itself becomes a source of value and a remedy against “common unhappiness”—at least that part which stems from social alienation. Included here would be therapies as diverse as Jungian analysis, transcendent therapy, primal therapy and reality therapy, and, by definition, the whole human-potential movement, with its emphasis on joy, spontaneity and intimacy.

The fourth ideology goes one step further within category three and rejects all the rest. It is called “radical therapy.” This movement flared up in the activist Sixties and has since somewhat subsided, but not without leaving its mark on theory and practice. The central slogan of the radical therapists was “Therapy means change—not adjustment”; and although they, like radicals everywhere, could not always agree on what kind of change they thought best, they were unanimous in rejecting (as “Band-Aids for the bourgeoisie”) most of the changes espoused by other therapies. Their particular scorn was reserved for Freud, in part because of the manifest elitism of psychoanalytic practice; but more significantly because Freud’s dictum (stated above) seemed heartless in face of the obviously powerful role social oppression plays in the development of neurosis. Further, it led to a practice, analytic therapy, that necessarily encourages reflection at the expense of action.

The main concern of the radicals was to shift emphasis to visible oppression, whether this be of women by men, blacks by whites, patients by psychiatrists, or everybody by capitalism. Therapeutic modes such as transactional analysis or other group means could be drawn into the radicals’ program, but only on condition that the categories by which behavior was to be explained be translated into directly political terms—i.e., terms that shifted the brunt of explanation from psychodynamics to sociodynamics on the broad scale. In sum, therapy was to be delegitimized as an institution. And since regarding human troubles as correctable by psychological means, or by individuals, saps the urge to unite as a class against the common oppressor, the delegitimization of therapy would deprive capitalism of one of its handiest props.

Surveying these ideologies, a few things stand out.

First, none of them could ever be applied in pure form by any therapist. Freud, for example, was quite prone to dispense advice (and on at least one occasion fed a hungry patient), and every psychoanalyst since has realized the necessity of conveying some reality to the patient, even if only in terms of the kinds of choices he made in dress, appearance, mannerism or location of office. Further, the kinds of responses made by the analyst invariably convey some sense of what he is interested in pursuing, as well as his style of thinking. And finally, there are many occasions when account has to be taken of concrete problems of living. At the other end, the most militant radical learns that if he practices therapy he has to appeal to some kind of inner emotional attitude if any change is to occur. Even if he chooses (as a number have) to drop therapy and try to accomplish the same ends by supposedly pure political means, he soon recognizes that the same subjective states play a large role in the way political realities are translated into the terms of everyday life. And the intermediate ideological positions are no less subject to compromise of one kind or another.

The second point is that compromises of ideology are forced
upon the practitioner by necessity. In short, ideologies have to be simpler than reality; indeed they distort reality and are in constant tension with it. In the present case the reality is the dialectical intertwining of the subjective and objective worlds, each with its hidden warping, each with its own laws, but each ultimately dependent upon the other. That is, neurosis would not exist did not the social world impose impossible contradictory and destructive demands on the growing individual—but once it does exist, it takes on a life of its own due to repression. Similarly, the social world is reproduced by and for people who have internalized destruction and contradiction—but once set going, it, too, takes its own course owing to the laws of political economy. Therefore all therapeutic ideologies are impossible to realize.

The third point, however, sets the matter back on track again. For the function of ideology is not to replicate reality but to guide it in a desired direction. Tension, imperfection and incomplete realization are necessary for all ideological positions, each of which expresses an “ought to be” on the part of the holder, and works to realize it. In this sense, then, therapeutic ideologies are authentic precisely as they strain against realization in practice. Therapy is worthless unless it gets us to aspire to something we might not ordinarily attain.

Further, all therapy is ideological, and no therapy is ideological. Wherever there is choice—whether to get treatment or not, whether to work at it or not, or whether to do anything or not—ideology necessarily exists, imperfect, perhaps implicit, yet always political. Reality is unformed, existing as a set of potentialities until human choice transforms it into a new, and still unformed, state. Ideologies may be efficacious or not according to how closely they approximate the actual dialectical state of reality. For example, the ideology of the Provisional Revolutionary Government conformed to the state of Vietnamese society while that of the Americans didn’t. Consequently that society was transformed in a communist direction. And once transformed, new conditions and new ideologies are required—e.g., “permanent revolution,” and so forth.

Similarly, Freud’s ideology and method corresponded to the state of Western culture at his time. However, the ideology and practice of therapy can never be considered as static. Therapy is in an ever-dynamic relationship to the condition of society as a whole and has to be continually re-evaluated as new historical developments occur. In light of the current state of American society, then, what would be an adequate ideological position for therapy? Here, subject to all the limitations, is one observer’s view.

It seems to me that the realities of neurosis in advanced industrial society have to be faced squarely, both as to their magnitude and causes. In this respect the radical therapies have made a notable contribution by pointing to the truth that neurosis springs not from some mysterious estrangement from nature, nor from “immortal ambivalence,” nor from suppression or mystification in the family, nor from somatic constitution, but rather from the total societal organization—in this case, advanced capitalism—as it imposes contradictions upon all the forms of personal life.

So long as we have a dominative society with division of labor, alienation and class distinction, its splits will devolve onto family life and, given the natural susceptibility of human infants, will produce neurotic characters of one kind or another. It may well be that the susceptibility of infants to trouble is such that even within a truly free socialist society—i.e., one different from the ventures so far initiated—certain neurotic tendencies will arise. But that is an experiment which has to wait its turn. In the meantime we are stuck with a social system that generates colossal amounts of neurosis from every corner. Any effort to grasp the problem at a lesser level is going to be futile.

A large body of emotional crippling occurs, now as before, from the endless variety of traumatization which befalls people caught up in the lower classes of society, and from the direct brutalization that is bound to occur at all levels. It is of considerable importance to note in addition, however, that in the present state of advanced industrial society the very attempt to rationalize the conditions of life (within which would be included many “mental health” programs) is bound to increase neurotic tendencies. This is because such rationalization—e.g., as discussed above, the psychologizing away of the oppression of women—is in the interests of reinforcing a basically irrational system of social relations.

More than a century ago Marx predicted that, with the increasing autonomy of the production process, the development of a new form of “social individual” would occur as a means of production. He might have added, had he been inclined to look in such a direction, that such an individual could not help but be neurotic. The relations of a social individual caught in an irrational society
include, but are not limited to, the special inhumanity of modern work. They extend as well into the area of consumption, which permeates family life and filters downward to each person—in a way too complex to be more than dimly suggested here—as the cultivation of infantile desire along with the usurpation of parental authority by media, work relations, education, etc. The child is asked to develop his or her rational faculties in order to renter authority by media, work relations, education, etc. The permeates family life and filters downward to each person—soothed with promises of personal fulfillment and happiness—without, to be sure, any solid communitarian base from which this is to spring.

The result is not the classical neurosis where an infantile impulse is suppressed by patriarchal authority, but a modern version in which the impulse is stimulated, perverted and given neither an adequate object upon which to satisfy itself nor coherent forms of control. In either case the impulse is inherently unrealizable; but the pattern of its disposition in the objective world changes. The disorder which is the hallmark of neurosis persists, as does the intrusion of unconscious desire and fear; but the entire complex, played out in a setting of alienation rather than direct control, loses the classical form of symptom—and the classical therapeutic opportunity of simply restoring an impulse to consciousness.

Beyond this point, however, the radical critique, at least as it has been made with respect to therapy, fritters itself away into mindless sloganeering. What the radical therapists forgot in their analysis was the distinction between the ultimate cause of a phenomenon such as neurosis and its actual manifestation. The harsh truth is that once neurotic repression sets in, whether at the behest of a repressive parent or by the alienated child's own effort to stem his feeling of inner chaos, the ensuing neurotic structure takes on a life of its own, becomes invisible. As a result any real connection to the world, such as can be gratified in action, is replaced by a symbolic linkage between a fantasy which goes its own way and a reality that represents it while being subject to laws of its own. I am not disputing the fact that concerted political action, especially that which unmasks the real external source of oppression, can have a beneficial effect on morale, etc., that goes will beyond simple material improvement. It may be that this is the most essential step, especially toward the prevention of neu-
with certain people. I refer here to some types of chronically psychotic individuals, whose disorders have brought them to a level of objectification at which drugs, directive therapy, etc., are rational means of treatment.

The truth of the matter is that great numbers of people throughout history have been crushed by the brutalization of life in a dominative society. They never develop a definably neurotic character structure in which the subjective life, for all its twistedness, can be held up to therapeutic influence. It is hard to classify such people—certainly their existence is not a simple matter of social class—and harder yet to formulate ways of dealing with their myriad troubles. But whatever the answers to their emotional difficulties, they will not be found in simple psychotherapeutics.

The principle to avoid totalization is not unrealistic, in that advanced society has brought about an amazing diversity both of troubles and of means for dealing with them. Nor is it unscientific, as Jung was when he blandly claimed that people had different psychologies, hence needed different kinds of treatment. Being scientific in the present case means recognizing that the study of psychology must take into account the fracturing of the self which has occurred pari passu with the alienation of reality under capitalism. It is as though a mirror had been splintered by a blow. One can account for how it cracked, even describe the optics of the matter and the behavior of the molecules of the glass. And for this, psychoanalysis remains indispensable as a scientific critique capable of describing the formation of the self, whether whole or fractured. But the mirror is still broken, and the image it forms remains fragmented. And no therapeutic prescription, psychoanalytic or otherwise, can be made except as the subject recognizes some part of himself in the glass and seeks to build on it.

Moreover, the avoidance of totalization in therapy puts ideology in the proper political place. Therapy has to be taken most seriously within the terms of the neurosis it addresses. When, however, therapy begins to acquire a superordinate value—that is, when the treatment promises liberation, transcendence or the answer to the riddles of life; indeed, when it becomes an end in itself offering the hope of happiness—then we may know we are being duped, and distracted from more valid goals. This can happen in any type of therapy, although some schools are more susceptible than others, as I tried to indicate earlier. It can arise from the worship of introspection in itself by psychoanalysts, or of orgasms, or of primals, or of sexual technique, expressiveness, est, consciousness, OK-ness, communication, reinforcers—name it, and it will be made into an idol by some therapist who knows that his idolization will reap therapeutic gains simply by giving people something to grasp in the void.

It would perhaps be more precise to call the process "fetishization," since the idol belongs to an earlier, religious phase of value, while the fetish is the creature of capital.6 Fetishized therapy enters the world of commodity relations, hence tends to succeed. And there it joins hands with the rest of mass culture, which works to colonize a person's subjective life in order to keep him in line. Mass culture defines a cultural world bounded by capitalist relations. When fetishized therapy pretends that an inevitably limited personal reconciliation is adequate as a source of happiness, it is also necessarily implying that society as it exists provides adequate conditions for happiness. Such a goal is no rational one but only a rationalization for the established order; hence fetishized therapy rides the mass-cultural bandwagon. Under such terms therapy becomes a game; and games, therapy. It merges with "human relations" and sidles into the halls of big business and the military; while the therapist become a kind of folk expert in values and a monger of the proper kind of life.

As part of mass culture, fetishized therapy becomes a fresh source of neurotic alienation. Its endless stream of moralizing slogans—"Be your own best friend"; "Stamp out sexual boredom"; "Stop hating yourself"; "Get it all out"; "Be free," etc.—does more than parody the original critical thrust of psychoanalytic thought; it sediments into a sludge of false consciousness that pretends to realize unconscious forces while in fact covering them with a thick layer of ooze. The promised payoff is in line with the ideology that we are to be happy with consumer society as it essentially is, thereby implying that we have no history to bedevil us.

But the unconscious is nothing but the claim made by lost fragments of personal history, and behind them, the history of a people. Hence fetishized therapy only changes the form of neurosis: Repression fails once again, the repressed returns, and the new, alienated self is led to turn to yet another therapeutic reassurance. Several of the newer therapies—for example, Gestalt or bioenergetics—arose in response to the fact that the sludge of
false consciousness has in large part been composed of the intellectualized Freudian insight which resulted from the fetishization of verbal therapies. As such the new therapies were pointed at a real need. But often they, too, were fetishized from the moment of their birth. Promising fulfillment within the given society, they became as much a part of consumerist culture as ready-mix pastry, leaving room behind for the next “breakthrough” and fad.

If therapy is to arrest neurosis and not advance it, the role it must assume is a modest, defensive one, without pretense or any kind of totalistic claim. In sum, therapy has no business imposing upon people either political categories they are unprepared to accept or spurious values of instant transcendence they are only too willing to swallow.

Here the reflective therapies, including but not limited to psychoanalysis, have a special opportunity—and a special potential for perversion. The opportunity lies in their imperative of truthfulness. Fidelity to the untidy truth about ourselves necessarily opposes totalization. Honestly pursued, it cannot but lead to resistance against mass culture’s colonization by false consciousness. But to honestly pursue the goal of truthfulness is to suspend ordinary judgments of ideology and value, all of which, no matter how “correct,” inevitably twist reality in the direction of wish. Therefore, to honestly pursue reflective therapy one must bracket out values, including political ideology, which point toward objective changes in the world.

Such a course is logical in view of the fact that a person’s subjective side is never in phase with either the way things are outside the self or with the way one wants them to be. Further, influencing a patient within the therapeutic session, in matters pertaining to the conduct of life outside, is always a doubtful venture, since the patient may well be under the sway of a transference that reflects the inner roots of domination, and not his mature capacity to judge. But to bracket things out means only to set them aside for the nonce; it does not imply neglect or the pretense that what goes on in the analyst’s office is the “real” reality. The latter illusion leads to the very fetishization of psychoanalysis which has made it into the conformist institution it is today. For the inflation of analytic insight serves the same function as that of behavioral modification: In each case it is a bid for authority and control, a quest for power, not truth.

The truest function of psychoanalysis lies in its capacity to pre-serve an authentic realm of the imagination. While the imagination holds the greatest terrors to which we can become subject, it also provides the wish to be free. Indeed it is what makes us distinctively human, containing in its unconscious recesses the seeds of the best as well as the worst in us.

The domination of consciousness by late capitalist culture makes its preservation a precious goal—and one subject to elitism. Psychoanalysis has cultivated a fidelity to the processes of self-formation which, for all the innovations in therapy, remains a unique testament to the worth of the individual. Yet at the same time, psychoanalysis has not been able to avoid becoming locked into upper-bourgeois class interests, a fate which has exerted an inexorably stuififying influence over its theory and practice, and may be sounding its knell as a vital element in contemporary society.

While much will have been lost in such an eventuality, I do not think we need fear the final extinction of the impulse to preserve what is life-giving in the imagination—or even the loss of its power in therapy. For not only is this impulse too deeply grounded to wither away just because an offshoot should lose touch with its own roots; but it continually reappears as one of those contradictions capital stimulates out of its own makings, then tries to quell as an intolerable threat. Hence capital does not create the imagination; it only draws it into a new level of struggle.

Indeed, although continually modified by real historical circumstances, the force of imagination is in a deep sense transhistorical. It is generated in each child out of the human givens of infantile sexuality and object loss, factors that have been necessary for civilization itself and long predate any particular phase such as capitalism. The record of the imagination, in fact, goes back as far as art itself. Freud added a scientific dimension to what had been embedded within art and so amplified its power as critique. But a century before Freud, Blake, who of all poets was most in touch with dialectics, made the same claim. Listen to a version from Milton:

But turning toward Ololon in terrible majesty Milton
Replied. Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man.
All that can be annihilated must be annihilated
That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery
There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
The Negation must be destroyd to redeem the Contraries
The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man. This is a false Body: In Incrustation over my Immortal Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway. To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination. To bathe in the Waters of Life; to wash off the Not Human. I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration. . . .

The Negation—in contemporary terms, false, colonized consciousness, encrusted, passive and given to accepting the order of things as eternal and natural—has to be eliminated in order to face the true clash of opposites, Contraries. “Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence,” wrote Blake in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. The sufferings of what we call “neurosis” represent a partial breakdown of the Negation of false consciousness. Closer to the impulse, with love and hate fused, then the flattened consciousness of official reason, each mental “disturbance” poses a dialectical opportunity. For the neurotic is both turned away from everyday reality and greatly inclined to submit to it. That is why we see neurotic people alternately rebelling and submitting: acting impulsively to free themselves, but winding up more enslaved than before.

The neurotic, in sum, is brought closer to Contraries but cannot face them. By reliving and mastering them, the neurotic disposition will be reversed. And this work can be begun but not completed in psychotherapeutic terms, for Contraries are not to be overcome within one’s head. Their true location is between the subjective and objective world: The Energy opposed to Reason “is the only life and is from the Body”—the material body, with its erotic striving, and the material body of politics as well. Blake never doubted that the struggle had to include concrete revolutionary practice. As David Erdman writes in his excellent study of Blake’s politics, Blake: Prophet Against Empire, for Blake, “at the limits of empire, Contraries begin.”

Contraries thus are situated in history—in real classes and the very material “dark Satanic Mills.” The function of the critical imagination, whether in art, therapy or politics, is to clear away false, Negated, consciousness so that the work with Contraries can begin. In political terms: After liberation from the old order, true revolutionary work begins. And in therapeutic terms: After Self-examination, on with the business of dealing with the contrariness of real life.

We may recast Freud’s dictum in Blakean terms—and, as he might have seen it, in Mosaic ones as well: Neurosis is grounded in everyday reality but breaks with it. Much will be gained if we succeed in mending that break by restoring to you the full power of your critical imagination. In that way you will be less neurotic and less dependent as well on Negations. You will be better prepared to deal with Contraries, closer to reality and more able to reverse the tide of common unhappiness. But I, your therapist, because of the special nature of neurotic distortion, and because I hold for you the goal of freedom, refuse to lead you further into the vision of a new community necessary to resist common unhappiness.

Therapy so viewed only hopes to mobilize our imaginative powers to deal with the real contradictions of life. There may be little solace in such a view, which promises no “True Self,” gleaming with authenticity, striding out from the rubble of neurosis. But therapy so viewed does hope to restore to people some of their capacity to love and to choose, and to begin making real demands on a world shaped by the lies of history. In this way they may begin to determine for themselves in which direction the true self lies.