

**RADICAL PSYCHIATRY:  
THE SECOND DECADE**

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**SECOND EDITION**

Part I:

# **THEORY**

# CHAPTER ONE:

## POWER

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Power and its effects, like the air we breathe, are all around us. Like air, power is essential to life. And just like the air we breathe power is subtly or grossly contaminated in ways which we are barely aware of and which we tolerate every day of our lives. We know that people power trip us and we know that we abuse our own power. Power is spoken and written about everywhere: horsepower, the power of the people, power plays, black power, power hunger, the power of love. We unleash power with a kick of our accelerator foot, we feel the power of people's eyes. We hear and read about power constantly and yet we do not really understand what it is, how it works, what it does, when it's good and when it's bad, where it begins and ends, how to get it, how to get rid of it, or how to fight it.

### **POWER AND RADICAL PSYCHIATRY**

Power is at the core of the concepts of Radical Psychiatry. Alienation, we believe, is the essence of all psychiatric "conditions." Alienation is the feeling within a person that she is unable to think, love or feel joy; that he cannot control his own body and behavior; that she does not deserve to live or that someone wishes him to die; that he is dead or that everyone is dead; or that she is not part of the human species. According to Radical Psychiatry principles all psychiatric "conditions," except for those that are clearly organic in origin, such as brain damage, or toxic conditions, are a form of alienation. Alienation is the result of oppression about which the oppressed has been mystified or deceived. Thus stated in a simple formula: **Alienation = Oppression + Mystification.**

Oppression can only be perpetrated through the use of power. We cannot oppress others if we have no power over them. As a consequence, because power is an essential ingredient of alienation we consider all psychiatric activity to be political in nature. This is because in every instance, psychiatric intervention affects the structure of the power relationships between people. Psychiatrists deal constantly with situations in which people are the victims of abuses of power. Psychiatric intervention invariably affects those situations, either by changing them or by leaving them alone in which case psychiatric intervention, by default, supports the oppressive status quo, and becomes, once again, political.

On the other hand, liberation from alienation can only be achieved through power. We believe that: **Contact + Awareness+ Action = Liberation.**

Awareness, Contact and Action are forms of power. Awareness is the power of knowledge, Contact is the power of people when they band together, and Action is the power of aggressive behavior.

Thus, power can be good or bad depending on whether it is abused to oppress or mystify, or whether it is used to liberate. The first part of this two-part paper will deal mostly with power abuses; bad power. The second part will deal with good power, the power that we need to live in harmony with ourselves, each other and the earth. Adequate psychiatric help requires the establishment of a very important distinction: the extent to which people are victims of power abuses needs to be reacted to and distinguished from the extent to which people are personally responsible for what happens to them. Yet, the facts of oppression and power abuse are assiduously avoided by establishment-trained psychiatrists. No power-related concepts occupy any status in current psychotherapeutic ideologies. Alfred Adler, a disciple of Freud, saw power as an essential fact in the lives of people, but even he only explored how people seek power rather than how

they use it or abuse it or are victims of its abuse by others. In any case, Adler's theories or the theories of other power-conscious therapists, such as Jay Haley, are not considered central in the field. Most professional psychotherapists are trained to ignore the relative power of the persons with whom they work. Generally speaking, power or political considerations are deemed irrelevant to the practice of psychiatry, and the people who indulge in power considerations are seen as "politically biased." As a consequence, psychotherapists tend to ignore what occurs in their consulting rooms when it has anything to do with the arrangements of power, especially the manner in which certain people, who have power over others, misuse it to their own advantage.

For instance, one of the most common forms of power abuse occurs in sexual relationships. Most therapists relate to the sexual difficulties between men and women as if they were caused by bad habits, unfavorable sexual conditioning, or a mismatch. Carmen Kerr (*Feminist Sexual Therapy, IRT*, Winter 1974) points out that sexist power behavior is at the root of much sexual dysfunction. "Frigidity," for instance, is often the result of the fact that the male dominates the sexual act in such a manner that a woman (who may be quite able to come through masturbation) simply can't create the necessary conditions for orgasm. Not many therapists would see this for what it is: the result of sexist power abuse by the man and sexist submission to male power by the woman.

Why is power, its uses and abuses, ignored by psychotherapists? Mostly, I believe, because they are not taught about it. But I also believe that a very important other reason is that therapists profit from being blind to power issues. Like other people who have power, therapists would prefer their own power and its abuses to be mystified, because the mystification of power is an essential aspect of its effective and guilt-free abuse.

Also, awareness of the facts of power and its abuses between human beings would quickly lead psychiatrists to the conclusion that as soul healers, they must become advocates of the oppressed rather than "objective" observers of and commentators on the human condition. Being an advocate of the oppressed is neither lucrative nor safe; for many it would represent a drastic cut in income and living conditions.

## Male Supremacy in Psychiatry

No class of human beings is better trained from childhood to maintain the mystification of power than the "civilized white man." My own understanding of power comes from being raised as such. As a white male I learned, early in my life, to accept with obedience the uses and abuses of power upon me, and then later easily learned and accepted the use and abuse of power training of adolescence, academic training, and professional "discipline." As is typically the case with white professional males, I had become a master of the subtle and gross abuses of power; I was one-up and largely tuned out to the dimensions and effect of my power. The misuse of my power was part and parcel of the everyday competitive, academic and professional rat race. I was a "dynamic," aggressive," "creative professional." These positive labels for the expression of my power helped to blind me to its negative effects. Interpersonal conflicts, loss of friendships, unhappiness, antagonisms, and the incapacity for cooperation and intimate relationships with men and women alike, were the consequences of my power training and behavior but I never clearly understood the connection. I was well trained as a mental health professional whose main function was to preserve and defend the oppressive power arrangements of the status quo by being an emotionally detached, "objective" advisor to people manifesting psychiatric disturbance. Because I was unaware of and blind to racism, ageism, sexism, coupleism, and in general all of the ways that people are oppressed, I tolerated and therefore supported them, as I searched for other more "psychological" deeper causes for people's unhappiness.

## The Women's Movement and the Male Psychiatrist

My own awakening to the realities of power and its abuses, still in process, came to me in the confrontation with the women's movement. I was fortunate to run headlong into powerful, determined, and compassionate women who were willing to struggle with me by refusing to submit to or go along with my mystification and abuses of power, while patiently explaining over and over what they consisted of. At first I was blind to them, but eventually I began to see the crude and subtle ways in which men oppress women and how I, as a therapist, had colluded with and contributed to them. I also saw more and more how I, as a man, was continually engaged in the oppression of women. Power and its abuses began to be clearer to me. In the last five years I have been observing and analyzing power, not only in my own personal life and in the lives of the people that I work for and with, but in general wherever I observe the oppressive behavior of individuals upon individuals and of social classes upon social classes. As a consequence, my approach to therapy has been radically altered as I incorporated a developing feminist awareness into it. This feminist awareness expanded into a broader understanding of how young and old people, gay people, single people, fat people, and other minorities are oppressed. As a therapist I can no longer speak to people without seeing and reacting to the power abuses in their lives.

## Class Analysis and Power

Those who have power and know that they do and are most adept at its use and its abuse are also those who pretend to have none or pretend not to use it (speak softly and carry a big stick). True, there are still some who have power and make no bones about it and do not attempt to mystify the fact that they will use their power to crush anyone who opposes them. But this crude application of power is not nearly as effective as the more "civilized," liberal, mystified abuse of power. It is when people are oppressed by power that is mystified that their alienation is most severe. Those who are oppressed in a crude way do not tend to become alienated since the result of obvious oppression is anger. For instance, we are likely to be self-righteously angry at a purse snatcher who steals ten dollars from us. But when the government uses ten of our tax dollars to massacre Vietnamese we suffer in confused, abject, guilty silence.

In this country we are the classic victims of "liberal," mystified oppression. We are persecuted and oppressed by smiling people who hold power the dimensions of which we are either dimly or completely unaware.

The habitual victims of power abuses are the members of large classes of disadvantaged people, the poor, the workers, third world, women, children, single people, gays, and the elderly, as opposed to the rich, bosses, whites, couples, men and the middle-aged. On the average, the members of the oppressed groups will experience a far larger numbers of injurious transactions than other people. And yet, it is essential to point out that members of every class, including oppressors, are oppressed and oppress each other (working class men push women and children around) and that some members of oppressed classes manage to significantly disrupt members of the oppressing classes (black men oppress white women, children oppress their parents).

Thus, the class struggle is not really taking place along one large front (working class vs. the bourgeoisie), but along several large fronts and many other minor fronts (many struggles, many fronts). On every one of these fronts a minority of people struggle to stop the abuses of power which are imposed on them. At any one time, even in the same room, an ex-mental patient may be struggling against a gay man who power plays her by talking fast, while a gay man is struggling against women who discount him, while women struggle against men (some of them gay couples) who dominate them, while some are struggling against

bosses who exploit them and all are struggling against a system which oppresses all, and the people within it (some ex-mental patients, some gays, some women and many of them men) who support it.

The abuse of power can be seen as a transactional event observable in everyone's life many times over in the period of a day. Everyone is oppressed to a larger or lesser degree and everyone is an oppressor, to a larger and a lesser degree; this fact is, to me, the source of great hope that the abuse of power can be successfully struggled with, because it is to a certain extent everyone's struggle, from the ruling class white male to the most oppressed.

The ebb and flow of power between people is as constant as the waves that batter the shore. The shore's power lies in its stability as it towers over the waters. The waves' power is their constant movement, their fluidity, as they steadily erode even the hardest rock. The class struggle between powerful and powerless has a similar quality; it goes on endlessly and can have only one outcome. We can speed that outcome by a careful transactional analysis of power.

### **Competition: Power's Workshop**

We are largely unaware of how power operates, how we abuse it and are abused by it, because we are immersed in and forced to accept its uses and abuses from the earliest moment in our lives. After spending our young lives as the victims of oppression, we quite naturally adopt oppressive roles when we grow up. The acceptance of power imbalances and power abuses is drilled into us through hierarchies and competition, both of which are as American as apple pie. We are told that "all people are born equal" which is another way of saying "I'm OK and you're OK," and that no one is better than anyone else. We are told this by judges, the Christian ethic, our constitution, and by our teachers and politicians. Yet, we don't really believe this at all because the real message is quite different. We are compelled by our training to see ourselves as better than others and to see others as our betters. To think and believe that we are actually equals, that no one is better than anyone else, that we are all complex, interesting, worthwhile and in the long run, equally important or unimportant, is a difficult conviction to achieve and to maintain.

The difficulty which we have in feeling equality with all other human beings is the result of our training and competitiveness, individualism and acceptance of hierarchies. We white North Americans are told that if pursued assiduously, competitiveness will lead us to happiness and success in life, and that if we don't succeed in life it is because we are not competitive enough or compliant enough to play by the rules of the game. (The game is good, the rules are fair, if you lose it is because you are not OK.)

We seem to live on a ladder with people stepping on our heads while we step on the heads of others, with at most two or three people on our rung with whom we feel equals. Once in a while some of us get to the top of the ladder and look down triumphantly, and sometimes we are thrown to the bottom, powerless. But we usually are somewhere in the gray middle, struggling to get up, preventing others from getting ahead of us and hoping to hold our own. The experience of hierarchies or one-up/one-down is so common to us that we think of it as a natural experience to be expected and one that we should react to by trying as hard as we can to "get ahead." Indeed, we don't really

struggle to get ahead but simply in order not to fall behind as everyone climbs over our heads.

This constant engagement in competitive behavior with its attendant mystification makes us power hungry and causes our behavior to be impregnated in power behavior.

When we begin to demystify power and we begin to see how it affects us in our everyday lives, it becomes an elaborately choreographed dance expressed in every moment in every movement, in every utterance with every person, wherever we go.

## Power and Competition in the Movement

The description of competitiveness given above exemplifies what most of us, in the U.S., are exposed to in our early childhood. Some of us eventually became part of what is called the "Movement," where it is an accepted premise that competitiveness, hierarchies and the abuse of power are undesirable. Those of us who consider ourselves earnest workers within the Movement are eager to stop behaving in these destructive ways, and we have all had notorious successes as well as failures in this struggle.

In the early sixties as the Black Power movement developed, the theme was to take power away from the oppressors. Malcolm X's cry was: "Give us power; The ballot or the gun." The Black Power movement pursued the acquisition of power through competitive means. Powerlessness was undesirable and competitiveness and hierarchies were not considered part of the problem; male supremacy was not challenged. The Black Power movement was extremely successful in bringing about its aim: to increase the power of the oppressed class of black people in this country.

Probably inspired by the separatist example in the Black Power movement, the Women's Movement started their own separatist drive. Initially, the emphasis of the Women's Movement was not to grab power away from men, but to remove women from men's power and its abuses. Women did not want to become men or be like men, and insisted on being removed from the oppressive influence of male power abuse. Some women came to feel that power, in fact, all power, was an undesirable attribute for a human being to have and should be stamped out of the Women's Movement along with the corollary of power, which is hierarchies. This wholesale rejection of power was probably the result of the fact that power was defined in male, competitive terms.

Attempts were made to create collectives and organizations in which all hierarchies were leveled and in which anyone who manifested any sort of individual powers was criticized and cowed into withdrawing such expressions. This approach had a certain amount of appeal throughout the Movement in the late sixties.

I strongly believe that the leveling of hierarchies and expressions of personal power within a group is a serious error. True, by reducing everyone's power to the lowest common denominator, we get rid of the bad aspects of power but we also prevent ourselves from being powerful and effective. Jo Freeman presents a good argument against leveling in "The Tyranny of Structurelessness."

The men in the Movement were forced to cooperate with the demands and expectations of the Women's Movement and realizing the extent to which competitiveness and abuse of power was part and parcel of their male role, many men endeavored to control their power, curb their competitiveness, reject their tendencies to create hierarchies and hold in check their tendencies to dominate women and their relationships. This had the effect of freeing the path for women within the Movement, but it also had the effect of effectively straitjacketing men so that to a large extent they became paralyzed with their powers imploded, sucked in; so that as women became powerful, strong and creative, men became lusterless, dull, passive, guilty and sulking, and scared.

Presently, in the struggle against the abuses of power and oppression, though we have come a long way, we are only beginning to deal with the problem. While it is true that we may be making some progress in the overt and gross abuses of power and hierarchies within the Movement, it is by no means true that we have

them under control in our more subtle, personal relationships. I see us as having a great deal of trouble with power; some of us are out of control with rampant competitiveness, others are walking around holding our breath, practically paralyzed in an attempt to be "good."

Even though we may no longer accept the crude, blatant competitiveness and power abuses that are part and parcel of the American way of life, I believe most of us still within our hearts carry the seeds of competitiveness, hierarchies, and power abuse. We are still deeply ingrained in hierarchies. Most of us, as we walk into a room, feel immediately one-up to certain people and one-down to others. We express the tendency to judge ourselves, and judge others in relationship to ourselves, to decide who is right and who is wrong, who is "in" and who is "out." When people disagree with us we discount their positions and try to demonstrate the error of their ways, instead of listening and entering into a dialogue. This form of behavior is as true of women as it is of men. I venture to say that if there was ever a myth that was exploded in the last years, it is the myth that women are less competitive, less into power hierarchies than men. The fact seems to be that as women are acquiring power, their behavior tends to closely parallel the behavior of powerful men who they have studied for examples on how to wield and understand power. It looks as if we are all equally unable to deal with and understand power and its abuses. At the same time, it also seems that women, in particular, are interested in defining a new kind of power, different from the abusive power that has been characteristic of men.

My opinion is that power is, per se, good. We need power, we want power, we deserve power. But power also corrupts and in order to have power without abusing it and oppressing others, we need to understand it for what it is, how it operates, how it is accumulated, how it is shared and how it is given up. We need to understand which expressions of power are harmful to ourselves and others and which are beneficial. To that end let me attempt to define power and its abuses.

### **Power: Definitions and Forms**

I would like to define *power* in the same manner in which it is defined in the science of physics: as *the capacity to overcome and move against the resistance of an opposing force*. There are two main forms that this capacity can take: physical power and psychological power. As an example, if I need to get my car over the hill I may be able to do so by pushing it. In this case, my physical power is overcoming the resistance of gravity. But I also have another form of power — psychological power — which relies on technique or manipulation rather than physical power. With a minimal application of my own physical power, I can still get my car over the hill if I master the technique of driving the car. If I can harness the energy or power within the object which I want to move, I do not have to exercise any extensive physical power of my own; I simply have to know the technique that is required. So I can overcome the resistance that prevents my car from going over the hill by getting into the car, turning the ignition and when the engine starts, by manipulating gears and clutch with the adequate technique, get the car over the hill. The same is true when we speak of the power that we have over people.

Let me give another example of oppressive power in which you or I want something that rightfully belongs to another person. On one hand, we may have the power to overcome that person's resistance through direct application of physical force, or we may be able to overcome his resistance through a technique which makes use of his own power. Let us imagine as an example, that you are sitting on a park bench on a spot that I want to occupy. If I can take the place away from you I will have manifested my power, that is, the capacity to move you against resistance, the resistance in this case being the fact that you do not want to move. If I am sufficiently strong, I may be able to push you or lift you out of your seat, and this is an example of physical power. On the other hand, I may have the psychological power to get you out of your seat without using physical force.

Psychological power depends on my capacity to harness your energy to cause you to do what you don't want to do. As in the case of the car, it relies on a technique designed to get you to move yourself out of the bench. All psychological power techniques depend on the property in people called *obedience*. I can intimidate you out of the seat, or I can cajole you. I can cause you to leave the seat to me by creating guilt feelings in you. I can intimidate you with threats, or with the sheer volume of my voice. I can seduce you with a smile, or with a promise, or I can convince you that giving up your seat to me is in the national interest, or necessary for national security. I can trick you, con you, or sell you a lie. In any case, if I overcome your resistance to giving up your place without using physical force, I have used psychological power which relies entirely on obedience on your part.

## The Abuses of Psychological Power

Most of the oppression or abuse of power that people experience is psychological in nature. People, even in the most violent environments, do not primarily experience direct physical oppression. But physical violence is all around, reminding us that disobedience is punishable, and backing up every case of psychological power abuse.

The most extreme example of psychological oppression is manifested in the *slave mentality*. The slave mentality is a frame of mind in which a person cheerfully accepts the oppressive circumstances of his life, defends his oppressors against anyone who criticizes them, and will actually fight and give up his life to bolster the oppression of which he is the victim. For instance, John, the son of a career military man, was raised under severe disciplinary conditions. All of his schooling was at military schools. He was a model student, disciplined and patriotic. After he graduated from the military academy he was sent to Vietnam where he was soon wounded. Now, a paraplegic, he is a hero in his home town and he is proud to have been able to defend his country and regrets only that his combat experience was so short. He hates the anti-war movement and is bitter about their contribution to American defeat at the hands of the communists.

Alienation, a more common and less perfect case of psychological oppression, is a situation in which people come to feel responsible for the effect that oppression has upon their own emotional integrity. As an example, hard-working people in this country will feel guilty and responsible for the fact that they cannot make ends meet with the money that they earn or for the fact that they cannot afford decent clothes and shoes for their children, or because they cannot obtain employment, or for being hungry. Even though others are taking away the fruits of their labor, many people submit to those oppressive circumstances and blame themselves for the failure of being able to earn a decent living.

The oppression of workers, women, blacks, children, gays and old folks in this country is maintained with a minimal amount of physical power. Most of it is accomplished because each individual is alienated to the extent that they are willing to oppress and persecute themselves and be obedient in the service of the ruling class.

In Radical Psychiatry we conceptualize the way in which we collude with and internalize our oppression as the *Pig Parent*. The Pig Parent is a colloquial term that represents all of the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and prohibitions which people carry within their heads and which aid our oppressors.

For instance, John, above, quietly suffered endless indignities as a cadet. He accepted these because his Pig would constantly remind him, literally whispering in his ear, that they were tests of his manhood. Today any hints of self-pity are countered by his Pig that says: "Don't be a complainer, it's unpatriotic." It is because of this willing, internalized oppression that a fairly small number of people can oppress millions without more than occasionally raising a finger to enforce it. Clearly, a large portion of our task is to get rid

of the Pig Parent, our internalized oppression, so that we don't obediently go along with the abuses of power around us.

## Power Plays

A power play is a maneuver designed to get something away from an unwilling person.

I have described the manner in which a person can use psychological power to take something away from somebody else. That situation (the Rip-Off power play) is one of the two major situations where power plays are used. Other situation is one in which a person who already has taken something away from someone uses subtle power plays to keep it. "Hold-the-Line" power plays are the most common in our world because they are the ones used to preserve the oppressive status quo. The ruling class is not as actively engaged in expanding its oppressive hold on us (though it is actively engaged in ripping off the third world) as it is in maintaining and defending the oppression that exists. The situation that we live in is one of already established oppressive institutions, which are extraordinarily complex, interlocked, mutually supportive and affect every facet of our lives. For instances, sexism supports the exploitation of labor which supports racism, which in turn supports the exploitation of labor which is supported by the wholesale addiction to drugs, which supports the medical establishment, which supports the exploitation of labor, and so on and so forth. All of these separate oppressive links combine into a structure, like girders combine into a bridge, which is able to support enormous loads. This intricate, monolithic structure of oppression is intensely committed to preserving its power, and every time we make a move to free ourselves, to take back what is ours, we are confronted with a power play that is designed to preserve the status quo and to hold-the-line. The only way in which we can bring to bear power equivalent to the powers that oppress us is to band together in an organized way. No individual or small group of individuals, no idea or single political line can possibly overcome the structures that oppress us. We need all the people with all the approaches we can enlist in our struggle for liberation.

However, oppression is not a mystical process occurring where we cannot fight or understand it. Oppression is made up of all of the separate oppressive transactions, each one of which can be confronted separately. Let me analyze the case of a psychiatric nurse, Alice, who decides that she no longer wants to wear a white starched uniform to work, because it is an extra expense which she can hardly afford and because it is uncomfortable, difficult to keep clean, and ugly.

Her first move might be to go to her supervisor and simply ask whether she can start wearing street clothes to work every day. The first Hold-the-Line power play will be "It-Says-in-the-Bible." "It-Says-in-the-Bible" is basically a reference to some canon or tradition, written or unwritten, which prohibits her from getting what she wants. The supervisor might say, "There is a rule that says that you cannot wear street clothes." Or, she might get a rule book and open it up to the page where uniforms are described. Let us assume that there is no such rule book and that Alice presses the supervisor further for justification of the rule. At this point the supervisor might go to the next power play, which would be perhaps to say, "Well, I'll bring this up at the next supervisors' meeting; why don't you talk to me next week?" This power play is called "Stalling." Any excuse to put some time between a person's request and a response is clearly going to weaken the person's resolve. Let us say that after a week the supervisor does not return with an answer and a week after that, Alice, undaunted, returns to the supervisor to ask about her uniform. The supervisor might now resort to further stalling techniques, such as, "I was not able to bring the subject up at the meeting; there were far more important things to talk about than whether you should wear a uniform or not." And Alice will be put off for another two weeks. Alice comes back and insists again; the supervisor might now use a status quo power play called "Love-It-or-Leave-It." She might say something like, "Perhaps you are not satisfied working here; we have found that there are simply those people who do not enjoy this type of work. Perhaps you should look for a job somewhere else. We will be happy to

recommend you." This power play is a veiled threat to the security of the person and can take other forms, for instance: "I see that your review period is almost over. I think we should set up a conference to evaluate your job performance; how about next Monday?" or pulling out Alice's personnel folder and saying, "I see that you had trouble at your previous job; it seems you have difficulties adjusting to working conditions." This type of a power play is usually sufficient to intimidate people into submission, but let's assume that Alice is not easily intimidated. She continues to insist. At this point, the supervisor may bring a person in the "chain of command," a man, to bear on the situation. This person might be paternal and nurturing and might attempt to mollify Alice, or he might be a stern authoritarian individual who might attempt to scare her. In any case, the subtle power plays to Hold-the-Line will continue until either Alice gives up or some effective method of silencing her is found. Clearly, Alice as an individual has very little chance of overcoming the barrage of cascading power plays which will be applied to her. It is not very likely that she can get what she wants without organizing and enlisting the power of a number of other nurses to bring about the desired end result, and when she does that, she can count on an even more intense application of power plays at increasing intensity.

Alice was able to stop wearing uniforms only after she organized eight of the twelve nurses on her service. What she wasn't able to accomplish in six months of individual struggle happened almost overnight when she moved together and decisively with her co-workers.

## **Obedience**

For simplicity's sake, Alice was given a personality free of the internalized collusion with her oppressive circumstances. That is, she was presented as an insistent, aggressive, brave person, without a Pig Parent. But she and most other people are not that fortunate. Every time someone power plays us, a host of supportive reactions spring up from within us: we feel guilty, we feel we are being obnoxious, we are ashamed of our need, we question its validity, we hear voices that tell us to give up, we are afraid. Consequently, we stop struggling or we don't even start. All of these reactions can be summarized under the label of obedience. Obedience is an important "virtue" which parents seek to educate into their children; just another example of how childrearing is often an unwitting proving ground for the oppression which we are expected to endure throughout life.

Obedience does not operate only in obvious hierarchies such as hospitals, factories, or the armed services. It operates also in one-to-one situations where there are no apparent hierarchies or where hierarchies are mystified. For instance, consider the following:

*Salesman:* You ought to buy this encyclopedia.

*Parent:* We can't afford it.

*Salesman:* How much is your child's education worth?

*Parent:* Well, let me see, maybe we can afford it.

or:

*Client:* What is your position on Women's Liberation?

*Therapist:* Why do you want to know?

*Client:* I guess I really don't *need* to know...

Both of these are examples of obedience in response to power plays. The first power play is designed to create guilt ("Aren't you ashamed?"), and a disobedient reaction would be: "None of your business," or sarcastically, "No, I am not," or; "Yes, but your books would certainly not help," or; "I resent your attempts to sell your books by creating guilt in me!"

The second power play is designed to stop a request by demanding a rational explanation for it ("If you can't prove it you can't do it"). A disobedient response would be: "Answer my question, please," or; "Don't answer a question with a question," or; "Because if I don't like your position I'll quit therapy!"

Disobedience is an important human quality which I as a parent encourage in my children because it renders psychological power plays practically useless. Disobedience is an essential skill in their preparation for the adult, competitive marketplace.

## Scarcity

In the competitive marketplace the value of an item is determined by the need for it and by its scarcity at any given time, rather than by any inherent or intrinsic value. Thus breathable air, even though indispensable for life and therefore extremely valuable, has no market value, because for the time being it is in abundance.

Scarcity of an item is a necessary condition for the appearance of power plays in a situation. Scarcity of food, of space, of commodities, of the things that we need or believe that we need, increases their value to us. When things become valuable because they are scarce they become the object of power plays. Conversely, anything that is freely available and which is not in scarcity will not be seen as valuable and will not be the subject of power plays.

Scarcity can be real or it can be artificial. There are certain things that we absolutely need to survive, such as food, water, air. These can be in actual short supply in which case the scarcity is real. If there is a famine in the land and there isn't enough food to go around, this is a real scarcity. However, a lot of scarcities that we experience are artificial. Artificial scarcities can be the result of the fact that someone has "cornered the market" by simply taking the item out of circulation. This is the specialty of monopoly capitalism: the creation of scarcities so that the demand goes up and large prices can be exacted. Some greedy capitalist is probably dreaming of producing and exploiting scarcity of air, right now.

Another form of artificial scarcity is the establishment of large numbers of needs in people for things that are not really necessary to their survival. For instance, while we need food to survive we do not need deodorants, cosmetics, fancy clothes, or the vast amount of consumer items which many of us work hard to make the money to be able to purchase. The creation of these needs in people results in a generalized scarcity of human energy, as more and more effort is put into obtaining the consumer items to satisfy these artificially created needs, which cannot ever really be completely satisfied.

Just as artificial scarcities can be created in commodities such as food and shelter which are essential to survival, artificial scarcities also can be created in human resources. Love, recognition and affection between people has been made scarce, through people's adherence to the rules of the stroke economy, which limits how and when people can give each other strokes. Consequently, people will power play each other over strokes, monopolize them, barter, sell, cheat and lie over them. Defeating the rules of the stroke economy produces an abundance of strokes which reduces people's tendency to power play each other over them.

The ultimate manifestation of scarcity over human resources is the scarcity over power itself. People's personal feelings of power over themselves, over all aspects of their lives, and over their destinies, have been curtailed and become scarce so that power too has become a competed-over human resource. Because we feel powerless, we seek power, for power's sake. Thus, we want to take power away from each other and we compete over nothing, just to establish or seize that false feeling of self-determination and competency which comes from dominating others. Meanwhile we let the power monopolists, our leaders and rulers, accumulate more and more power.

I believe that just as in the case of strokes, the scarcity of feelings of power is artificial, the result of a carefully controlled economy of power the rules of which we faithfully obey.

All of the artificial scarcities that we are prey to, of commodities, of love, of power, keep us off-balance, obedient, pliable, too concerned with the moment to struggle against their causes. Thus artificial scarcities benefit the ruling class in two ways: because they result in higher profits for commodities and because they keep us constantly in the red with our heads barely above water, struggling just to survive.

To defeat the scarcity of power we need to free up our personal powers. Not our powers to dominate, or be strong at the expense of others, but our powers to be strong from within ourselves and with others--the powers of survival, sex, energy, love, communication, knowledge and unity with nature, which all of us have and need to reclaim so that we may give up our acceptance of hierarchies, competition and power plays in our lives.

## **THE SEVEN SOURCES OF POWER**

### **An Alternative to Authority**

Tolstoi's definition of power as "the combined will of the masses vested in one person" perfectly illustrates the problem with the concept of power. Most thinking about power addresses only the kind of power that involves control of many by a few.

The subject of power was not part of my education or thinking (although certainly part of my behavior) as a psychologist or psychotherapist until about 1969. After working out the script matrix (Steiner, 1966), I began to see that the diagram was more than a visual aid representing the transactions of the three main players of the family drama: the parents and the child. The script matrix showed the parents above and the child below, thus realistically representing a dimension that goes beyond the transactional into the realm of power or the relative capacity of the players to affect each other (with the offspring at an obvious disadvantage).

I saw clearly for the first time that the young child is in the classic position of the oppressed: not totally powerless, but one-down in relation to the parents who are one-up. Because the view of the child as oppressed and overpowered is not universally accepted, some people disagreed with the unevenness I postulated in the parent-child relationship and even argued that the child often has the upper hand. At that time, my work as a therapist was less active in the area of parent-child relationships than in the relationships of the adult men and women who sought my counsel. It was while mediating in the "war of the sexes" that I saw in stark relief the one-up and one-down maneuvers people use to stay in control and to maintain or advance their position in life.

Eventually I saw beyond these control maneuvers or power plays to the variable of human power itself, a factor in human life far more central than the domination of others through power plays. Power, which I

believe is best defined as *the capacity to produce change*, is a more extensive faculty than manipulation or control of others, itself an extremely limited form of power.

## The Powerless and Authoritarian Scripts

One of the most common and damaging scripts, which is shared by most people and is therefore largely unnoticed and taken for granted, is the script of powerlessness and its mirror image, authoritarianism. The seeds of this script are sown through one-up/one-down transactions in childhood. The script teaches the child that power equals control and that control is the way to bring about change and to be powerful in the world. It denigrates other sources of power, reducing the multidimensional realm of human potential into a unidimensional "ladder of success" on which people line up, some above, some below, stepping on each other as they struggle to climb to the top.

The deeply ingrained banal tendency of people to line up in the competitive one-up/one-down continuum constantly has the potential of getting out of control. This occurs when the peculiar chemistry between authoritarian and powerless people produces a polarization in which those in a one-down position collude with an authoritarian person to develop a symbiosis in which power is relinquished by the many to one who willingly takes it from them. Thus the Master/Slave, Leader/Follower one-up/one-down relationships in families, schools, and workplaces can become a social tide that sweeps whole countries or continents. It is during this process that some Bystanders, unable to stand life in the Master/Slave continuum, become Resisters (Jacobs, 1987).

What makes people Resisters in a situation where authoritarian powers attempt to establish control? In my opinion, people who resist domination are powerful in their own right, independent of their place in a hierarchy. How does one acquire this kind of power? The totality of a person's power or charisma depends on the development of various sources of power such as knowledge, communication, love, passion, transcendence, grounding, and control, each of which adds to a person's capacity to have an effect in the world. The individual with a sense of power in the world responds badly to others' efforts to control. Resistance comes naturally in such situations, just as passivity is the natural consequence of powerlessness.

## Seven Sources of Power

The following paragraphs outline seven sources of power which have their origin in the ancient theory of the *chakras* of Kundalini yoga: earth, sex, power, heart, throat, third eye, and cosmos. These seven power sources, of which control is but one, better represent the rainbow of options which is power than the colorless, unidimensional power based solely on control.

**Grounding:** The capacity to stand one's ground, to occupy the space that we are allotted, to be rooted and to be comfortable while standing, walking, or running upon the Earth is an important source of power.

Each source of power can be underdeveloped to the point of nonexistence or overdeveloped so that it crowds out other sources of power. A person deficient in grounding is physically unstable, easy to push around, easily frightened, unsteady on his or her feet. When overdeveloped along these lines, a person is stubborn, stony, unmovable, and dull.

**Passion:** The powers of passion and its most common manifestation, sexuality, are capable of mobilizing and invigorating people as nothing else can. The power of passion is the power to create, to recreate, to transform; in short, to inflame with energy and produce sudden change. When underdeveloped in this area a person is unexcitable, boring, and gutless; when fixated in it, a person is driven by sexual passion and the fanaticism and violence that result when such strong drives are repressed.

**Control:** The capacity to aggressively manipulate the environment and people, either physically or psychologically, is the form of power that has crowded other forms of power from awareness. The extreme form of control is represented by our culture's highly valued "competitive personality," the individual who is highly competent in the use of power plays and sees every interaction as an opportunity to test who is better, who is right, who knows more, or who has more of some commodity. Underdeveloped control power produces individuals who cannot deal with their internal or external environment. They cannot control their feelings, what they say or do, what they ingest; they are generally unable to get what they want from others, and are perceived by others as losers.

**Love:** Knowing how good it feels, everyone wants to love and be loved, yet few people recognize love's power. The power of love is enormous; it is capable of overcoming vast obstacles. Its power binds people, thus enabling them to work together. Love has the power to nurture, to heal, and to instill hope that can propel a person out of the most dire situations. When the power of love is underdeveloped, a person is cold, incapable of experiencing loving feelings or of benefiting from one's own and other's strokes, unable to nurture and be nurtured, unable to love himself or herself. When this form of power is overdeveloped or fixated, people feel driven to excessive sacrifices and to giving themselves away to others while neglecting themselves.

Certain sources of power are stimulated or squelched by different cultures, thus giving rise to cultural scripts. In our culture, the power of love is encouraged for women and discouraged for men; in contrast, control is encouraged for men and discouraged for women. This leads to troublesome interpersonal inequalities which reinforce the one-up/one-down scripts in the population.

**Communication:** The power to produce in someone else the feelings and ideas that reflect one's own is the power of communication. It is essential for effective and satisfying relationships, for transmitting knowledge, and for solving problems between people.

As with the other forms of power, communication works in conjunction with other sources of power. Communication can work in combination with control, in which case the effect (browbeating) will be different from the combination, say, of communication and love or communication and sexuality. Ideally communication works in conjunction with knowledge and love so that, rather than browbeating someone in order to convince them, a person communicates to share truthfully and nurturably; thus the recipients can compare what they already know with what is being communicated and form their own, new opinion.

**Knowledge:** The four sources of knowledge are science, intuition, wisdom, and vision. Scientific knowledge is derived from the methodic observation of variables and their effect on each other. Intuitive knowledge is derived, not from systematic scientific observation, but from holistically grasping the laws of nature. Wisdom or historical perspective comes from knowledge of past

events either through personal experience or through the study of history. Vision is the enlightened capacity to see what lies ahead, not through extrapolation, which is a scientific form of knowledge, but through the actual perception of future events. Ordinarily, only science is considered to be a valid source of knowledge. Wisdom, intuition, and vision are increasingly discounted in that order: Wisdom is for old people, intuition for women, and vision for lunatics. Nevertheless, each of these forms of knowledge has validity and adds to a person's total power. Ignorance is the consequence of the underdevelopment of this form of power; excessive reliance on the power of knowledge is the consequence of its overdevelopment.

**Transcendence:** Transcendence is derived from a person's unity with the universe. It is the power of the consciousness of one's participation in every aspect of the cosmos, such that existence is detached from any particular material form. With this understanding, one does not fear death or the future because unity with the universe cannot be disrupted by events. One can "rise above" a situation and maintain one's sense of power regardless of material conditions. Underdevelopment of transcendence causes people to see themselves as separate entities and renders them insensitive to other living beings and the environment. When overdeveloped, this power causes detachment from earthly connections, a sort of floating away which can be seen as a mystic state but is more often seen as schizophrenia.

This multilayered view of power implies that the fixation on control as a source of power is a restrictive script that renders large numbers of people powerless in the face of individuals who occupy the high positions on the control hierarchy. The greatest antidote to authoritarian power in which a few dominate the many, is for people to develop individual power in its multidimensional forms and to dedicate themselves to passing on power to as many others as can be found in a lifetime.

## CHAPTER TWO: LOSS OF POWER — ALIENATION

*Beth Roy*

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Just as power is a concept which is central to the theory and practice of Radical Psychiatry, so is its opposite, alienation. To move toward power in a new and humanized sense, we believe we must first understand how we have come to be without it. Change, we believe, is not simply a state of mind; before we can attain our ideals — what “might be” — we must understand “what is.”

### **ALIENATION IN THE RADICAL PSYCHIATRY “FORMULA”**

As we use the term in Radical Psychiatry, “alienation” is an opposite for “taking power,” “liberation” — we have, in fact, debated over the years exactly what its opposite would be, for we are talking both about improvements in the quality of personal life, and about social transformation. We believe that personal and political change are interconnected: personal “growth” cannot occur without changes that transcend the individual, and social change is a drama of real people, actors in an historical play which is written by those who perform.

We sought the components of alienation in our own actual experience and that of the people with whom we work, and we came up with a formula: **Alienation = Oppression + Mystification + Isolation.**<sup>1</sup> What historically was useful about this formula is that it suggested, again, a list of opposites: **Liberation** (or Power in the World — we’ve experimented with various expressions here) = **Awareness + Contact + Action.** Each of the terms to the right of the equal sign does, in fact, describe a part of our practice. We work in groups so that people can have contact with supportive peers. We use the concept of Internalized Oppression, or the Pig, to counter mystification. We help people to take real action in their lives and in the world, on the theory that inner realities are altered when outer ones are, too.

The relationships between mystification, oppression and isolation are highly illuminating. There is something essentially modern about the juxtaposition of those three conditions. A feudal peasant, for instance, was seriously oppressed, working exhaustively for a master to whom he was irretrievably tied. Yet the nature of that tie was very clear; no movies offered the promise that, by dint of hard work and superior smartness, the peasant might become a lord. No TV commercials suggested that life would be bearable if only the peasant could obtain a racy automobile and a skinny woman. Nor was the peasant left to bear his troubles alone. According to a new breed of social historians, he did, in fact, complain to his fellows, periodically rebelled, was helped by his neighbors, and so on. He *was* very seriously oppressed; his fate was not better than a modern person's. But it was different in some ways that are important to understand if we are working toward change, especially psychological change.

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<sup>1</sup> A number of articles have been written about Radical Psychiatry and alienation. See “Alienation” by Hogie Wycoff and Claude Steiner, in *Readings in Radical Psychiatry*, ed. By Claude Steiner; and the various versions of Radical Psychiatry Principles written by Claude in *Issues in Radical Psychiatry* over the years.

## MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

To understand those differences, let us first look at Marx's conception of alienation. Marxist scholars sometimes chastise us for using a Marxist concept in a way that differs from Marx's understanding of it. We must plead guilty. Marx's formulation of the concept of alienation is certainly a major inspiration for our own ideas. But no body of ideas can (or should) be static. We (as well as many Marxist scholars) have continued to elaborate those ideas in the light of history.

What Marx saw so clearly was a process by which humankind becomes separated from a sense of our unity — what Marx called our “species-being.” His creative vision of a world undivided by class or other categories provided an alternative against which to describe alienation in the present. Recognizing that an alienated state of existence seemed “natural,” as it still does today, he sought to describe its absence when he spun visions of “communism”: “...the positive abolition of...human self-alienation and...the real reappropriation of the human essence by and for man.”<sup>2</sup>

For Marx, alienation was a function of the work process. He believed that labor is a crucial factor in determining how people feel about themselves and about the world, both because so much of life is spent working, but also because life itself depends on our collective ability to transform nature in ways that make it sustain survival:

...the first premiss of all human existence (is)...that men must be in a position to live...But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing, and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.<sup>3</sup>

The primary way in which modern people are alienated, thus, derives from the organization of work, and the fact that labor itself is alienated. What people produce is not for their own use, but is merely a means to an end, a way to earn wages with which to purchase what is needed for survival. Nor does she receive full benefit from what she produces; someone else profits, while the worker merely survives:

Labour produces works of wonder for the rich, but nakedness for the worker. It produces palaces, but only hovels for the worker; it produces beauty, but cripples the worker; it replaces labour by machines but throws a part of the workers back to a barbaric labour and turns the other part into machines. It produces culture, but also imbecility and cretinism for the worker.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, Marx's passionate prose seems overdone in a day of workers' TV sets, Toyotas and mortgages. Nor is it altogether clear anymore who exactly the workers are. But the sense of working for purposes not directly one's own is still common. How many people spend their weekdays at tasks which have little significance except to bring in a paycheck.

The effect of alienated labor is profound: “While alienated labour alienates (1) nature from man, and (2) man from himself, his own active function, his vital activity, it also alienates the species from man...”<sup>5</sup> The revolution Marx sought, then, was at heart not about economics or politics, but about the quality of life. To him, quality meant putting the parts back together.

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<sup>2</sup> “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” *Selected Works*, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> “The German Ideology,” *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” *Ibid.*, pp.79-80.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

## ALIENATION IN THE EIGHTIES

That Marx concentrated on work made sense in his day. The nature of work was becoming radically restructured by industrialization and capitalism. Not only were the new factories alienating and atomizing people in the ways Marx described, but they were, paradoxically, also bringing workers together. Never before had so many people been concentrated under a single factory roof, each dependent on the others for survival. Marx understood clearly that capitalism divided workers, but also created massive opportunities for cooperation among them, and that concentration of workers was ripe with revolutionary potential. Marx was, above all, a revolutionary, looking for the sources of humanizing change; nowhere were they more dramatically apparent in his day than in the industrial workplace.

### Oppression

For us, however, work has become a far more complicated and confusing proposition. It is still a primary source of oppression. That is to say, many, many people still are without power in the realm of work. Unemployment confronts whole sections of the population, especially black men and teenagers, with little evident chance for change. The '80s have seen a decline of labor unions and new salary rollbacks. Even executives fear for their futures; job security, except for tenured college professors, has become a thing of the past. Among the most common complaints in therapy, moreover, are boredom and conflict at work; the task of finding meaningful work is ongoing and extraordinarily difficult.

Oppression, in addition, takes newly recognized forms outside the workplace. People of color, women, children, lesbians, gays, the disabled, the elderly, all have brought to our attention in the last two decades the particular ways in which they are prevented from exercising power. Economics are clearly (or not so clearly) involved in all these stories, but the ways in which people are separated from their powers are varied.

How we are kept from being powerful only becomes fully evident, however, when we try to change. When we do, the psychological nature of our oppression begins to emerge. What the Radical Psychiatry formula suggests ( $\text{Alienation} = \text{Oppression} + \text{Mystification} + \text{Isolation}$ ), in fact, is a form of alienation that relies heavily on culture — how our lives are presented to us in images, language, art and religion — and on the structure of personal life. Because lies and isolation affect us on a most intimate level, oppression comes to penetrate the individual psychologically. We are not only oppressed economically, but we also blame ourselves for our oppression, suffer in our relationships with those nearest to us, and in the process become agents of our own oppression.

### Isolation

Each of us encounters numbers of forces that act to isolate us in the course of daily life. The ways in which lives, both private and public, are organized tend to keep us separate from others. In particular, the form of family life, the absence of communities, and the hierarchical organization of work help to isolate us.

**Family:** In the nineteenth century, as a major reorganization of work occurred around the creation of large-scale industries, so also was the family restructured in very fundamental ways. Extended families, living for generations in close proximity to other families, broke up. Gradually, generation by generation, family units became smaller and smaller. In the 1950s, when social scientists began writing frequently about the new “nuclear” family, they meant a heterosexual couple and children. Today, even that reduced institution, living separately from grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, not to mention friends and neighbors, is

diminishing further. Now many children are raised in single-parent families, almost always by a woman alone<sup>6</sup>. Households consisting of one person living alone have increased hugely. The atomization of private life seems to be proceeding toward the ultimate: a family of one.

Nonetheless, the idea that couples are a “natural” unit around which to organize private living continues to hold sway. In the search for mates (a project well worth pursuing) many people overlook friendships. Even when friends are important, they tend to be excluded from the most important parts of living, called on for “socializing” but not for help at basic levels. And too often busy lives force choices between time spent with lovers and time spent with friends. Lovers generally win, and so couples are nurtured at the expense of friendships. In turn, the lack of friends overburdens lover-relationships with needs, both emotional and material; many a couple has floundered on the rock of isolation.

**Lack of Community:** One important reason why people rely so on families and couples is that more widespread resources are scarce. The natural communities of even a generation ago are now hard to find. The obvious ways in which communities have vanished are well documented: Social mobility dilutes neighborhood life. Dense urban living under bad conditions encourages violence in the cities, and fear keeps people imprisoned in small apartments. Church life, while still an avenue of community for many, is not for many others. Political movements are transitory, and not sufficiently compelling to help people forge strong bonds. The next chapter returns to the problems of community in our times.

**Hierarchy:** Work, another potential source of human contact and community, tends too often to be divisive. Most work organizations rank employees in an intricately graded scale of power and authority. Hierarchy spawns competition; attitudes of suspicion and hostility rather than friendliness and cooperation are promoted. Real job scarcities also help to create a feeling of “every man for himself” at work.

Hierarchy, and the competitiveness which is its psychological and behavioral accompaniment, permeates our lives (see the next chapter). Hierarchy is not new; in older, more rural settings, the village contained clear rankings of authority. But those rankings of an earlier age were based on position — on your gender, age, possessions, titles and so on. Today, places on the ladder are very personal. How high you rise, according to the mythology at least, is a function of how smart you are, how hard you work, and so on. These ideas (most often lies) combine with the real divisions of life to isolate us.

And the divisions are endless. Men and women, races, generations, all are divided and arrayed against each other. People who in other ages were accorded service and protection, now must take care of themselves: the disabled fight for their rights; the elderly organize Grey Panthers. People are shunned because of their sexual preferences, their religion, their politics. Some of these divisions are age-old; others are peculiarly modern. But over time they tend to multiply. Ethnic wars, religious wars, racial wars bring tragedy all over the globe. Our age, unique in giving birth to the economic reality of a single world, has also paradoxically produced a greater array of divisions and hostilities than ever before.

## Mystification

Lies, as we've already suggested, are an important element in perpetuating isolation. They are one form of the mystification of our oppression. Each system of oppression — inequalities based on class, race, gender,

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<sup>6</sup> In 1991, 1/4 of all children, or 16.6 million children, double the percentage of 1970. “New Realities of the American Family,” by Dennis A. Ahlburg and Carol J. DeVita, *Population Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No. 2, August 1992.

sexual identity, age — produces, and is produced by, certain crucial lies. Paradoxically, these lies are often called “self-evident truths.”

**Class:** “If you work hard enough, you can be successful.” “Any American (boy) can grow up to be president.” “If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?” Messages about the individual's capacity to succeed in America are many — and, to those of us on the left, relatively accessible.

Like most successful mystification, these statements are not ungrounded falsehoods; they rest on a kernel of truth. We all know of real rags-to-riches stories. My own grandfather rose from the ghettos of New York to become a movie mogul. What is a lie, however, is that anybody can do it. White men have substantially greater chances of rising from poverty to plenty than do people of color or women. Even if everyone had equal opportunity, places at the top are strictly limited. Only a certain (small) proportion of those who work hard can in fact succeed. On the other side, how many at the top got there through honest hard work, and how many through other, less uplifting means? The scoundrel who wheels and deals and charms his way to the top is a sort of folk hero in America; his counterpart in real life is more likely to be a ruthless, one-track dynamo — with a fair amount of luck as well.

New mystifications mark the world of work in the '80s. One important theme is about workers' relationships to business. Import competition fuels the idea that unionism has not worked. Workers' demands for high wages and job security, goes the new myth-in-the-making, have undermined American productivity, and caused us to falter in the international race for markets. Better to do it the Japanese way, to rely on benign capitalism to provide workers with everything they need. After all, workers and capitalists ultimately share the same interests: to sell the goods and to make money. So identified are their interests, in fact, that workers can get shares in the company and become owners. Indeed, it is a great boon to them to receive stock in lieu of those undermining raises.

Again, it is important to analyze the lies and mystifications contained in this picture. For it is true, in one frame of reference, that international competition challenges the well-being of American workers. The lie which contributes to people's alienation, however, is that employees should depend on the superior goodness and wisdom of those with more power, that to insist on one's own rights and to negotiate from a position of unity is a mistake, is, indeed, the ultimate reason for the economic bind in which American business finds itself. That idea, of submerging oneself in the general and common interest, easily extends to personal life, where we are already taught to submerge our own wants and needs in the ocean of greater necessity: not to dream, not to demand, but to be obedient and quiet.

**Race:** Another offshoot of these '80s myths about work is a newly heightened racism, especially toward Asian people. Japanese are at once held in contempt as worker-ants, lacking individuality, prepared to labor ceaselessly to steal the American advantage. At the same time, they are held up as the model of “good workers.” Other Asian immigrants are seen as thieves arrived on American shores to steal jobs. No wonder that battery of Asian-Americans is on the rise. Friends pass on racist jokes with no self-consciousness, in a national atmosphere of tolerance for contempt.

Lies about race affect all Americans, whether directly or indirectly. The black power movement of the last few decades revealed popular “truths” about black people to be the lies they clearly were: lies about beauty, about work abilities, about sexuality, and so on. In the '80s, social scientists promote a new layer of mystification with the quantity of writings about the demise of the black family. Based on realities of the hardships experienced in the black community because of unemployment, these studies mystify by omission. They fail to mention the many durable black families which do no better, no worse than families in the white community. They suggest that the absence of fathers is responsible for drug and crime

problems in the ghettos, failing to mention obvious economic problems on the one hand, or on the other hand, the power of black women to band together and to rear children competently, as they have done for many generations.

What is less well understood than the oppressive effects of racist mystification on those who are oppressed is the power of racist lies to undermine those of other races. White people lose potential sources of unity with allies, most obviously. But they also are imbued with an idea about “human nature” that affects their own sources of inner power. “If Asians are docile, blacks are lazy, Jews are greedy, then what are we?” Such iron-clad attributions cannot be contained out there; they must come home to roost. They feed directly into a form of thinking which afflicts us all, because they establish the legitimacy of such judgmental thinking, of such unyielding absolutes and deadening conclusions, however different the content may be when they are applied to ourselves. If people of one skin color can be described as lazy, those of another can believe themselves to be weak if they do not earn a high salary, or stupid if they are passed over for promotion, or cruel if they are angry at their husband, or bad if they are lusty. Racism is a major vehicle for carrying oppression inward (see Chapter 5 on Internalized Oppression).

**Gender:** Gender-based mystifications have been well-documented by feminist writers.<sup>7</sup> As we watch films of Marilyn Monroe from the vantage point of the ‘80s, for instance, it is clear that women of her generation were taught to believe that they would be cared for in the world if they were demure, non-threatening, sweet and cute. All Monroe's body language, her voice, and her message presented her as a child, a totally innocent vehicle for a woman's sexuality. Today we know that Monroe had a powerful intellect and was a person of considerable depth and anguish. How hard she worked to present herself as simple and dumb! Today we also know how dramatically those beliefs in woman's role failed. Monroe died tragically, and millions of less renowned women suffered, continue to suffer, equally dramatic disappointment.

Today's teenage girls live with different messages. Women are now decisively integrated into the labor market. To be sure, even in the ‘50s the notion that good women would be cared for economically by a man was often an outright falsehood; many blue-collar women and women of color always worked. But today women of all classes accept the notion that they will work, that they cannot depend on Prince Charming to carry them off into the sunset. Yet young women and men are still imbued with old lies, however new their ‘80s garb. Popular music sings that a “crying man is half a man,” and that women should use “what she's got to get what she wants.” Girls know that, to be safe, they must take care of themselves, but to be happy they must have a man, and to have a man they must be skinny.

The mystified ideas that accompany each system of oppression can be similarly discerned. All through history, the reality of people's lives has been at variance with ideas socially accepted about those lives. Think, as one example among many, of the differences between the chivalrous idea of womankind in the Europe of the Middle Ages, and the actual restrictions on women's activities. Or consider the accepted truths during American slavery about the sub-human nature of black people, and the realities of endurance, ingenious alliances and courageous resistances of the slaves.

Modern life, however, sees a proliferation of the means of carrying ideology into the homes, and indeed the souls, of every individual. Television, newspapers, movies — all the various cultural forms with which we have daily contact — promote pictures in our heads of how the world is, and how we ought to be. The individualized and moralistic fashion in which disinformation is accomplished is peculiarly modern. So also is the elaborate complex of institutions which promote ideology to the individual.

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<sup>7</sup> For example: Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1952); Firestone, Shulamith, *The Dialectic of Sex* (Cape, 1971); Millett, Kate, *Sexual Politics* (Simon & Schuster, 1969).

There is a lively debate about the nature and role of ideology in forming our world. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian intellectual and Marxist, launched a school of thinking about the ways in which institutions — schools, churches, literature, media — all become effective instruments of the state, promoting a body of ideas which supports and protects power. “Hegemony” was the word Gramsci used to describe the process by which these institutions come to set the terms within which we think. Controversy is contained within invisible limits. We think we have “freedom of thought”, but in fact certain ideas never occur to us, and so we do not think them. For many years doctors debated the proper conditions under which women should be permitted to abort fetuses. It took the Women's Movement to introduce the idea that abortion decisions were no business of doctors at all; the woman herself was the one to decide. The concept of insanity was assumed to be a medical (or, in an earlier age, a religious) fact until R.D. Laing, Thomas Szasz and other thinkers introduced the idea that madness was socially constructed. Today, politicians debate the size of the defense budget in proportion to social welfare spending. But because premises of anti-communism are so widely accepted, no one of national prominence seriously proposes that we not arm ourselves at all.

Through the concept of mystification, especially in its relationship to Internalized Oppression (see Chapter 5), Radical Psychiatrists seek to understand the ways in which ideology becomes a psychological force, elaborating notions of Gramsci's on a personal level.

## Alienation Four Ways

What results from oppression, isolation and mystification is alienation of four levels:

- ◆ We are alienated *from ourselves*, from knowledge of our bodies, confidence in our minds, the power of our hearts. Shame and self-doubt still our tongues, while lies and secrets render powerless our eyes and ears.
- ◆ We are alienated *from each other*. Human connection becomes a lost art form. Books are written to teach us how to mate. Therapy becomes a “normal” avenue for “making relationships work.” Classified advertisements offer love in among the automobiles, computers and garage sales. Those working for genuine social progress call each other ugly names and fail to notice the personal anguish of their fellows.
- ◆ We are alienated *from the world*, believing that our vote doesn't count, that our desires don't matter. We wake in the dark to terror of nuclear holocaust. With moral anguish we watch our own “representatives” support the toppling of other peoples' democracies. Helplessly, we see flash across our TV screens images of South African children beaten and brutalized time after time after time.
- ◆ We are alienated *from the Earth*. Our lives are lived out in cities of concrete and steel. Food comes from the grocery store wrapped in plastic. Water comes from a tap; its only connection to the rhythms of weather and seasons is announced on the evening TV news. Not even air can be taken for granted. Chemicals pollute what we breathe; layers of brown smog cloud the horizon. We cover our faces with more chemicals to protect ourselves from skin cancer, and we are so at risk because we have lost the protection of the ozone layer. We watch daily the destruction of our environment, and we are convinced we can do nothing.

But can we? The work of Radical Psychiatry is no political panacea. But we do believe that we have much more power than we know, in the small but vital corner of the universe called “our own lives.” We can connect, heal each other, cooperate and make powerful changes.



# CHAPTER THREE:

## RECOVERY OF POWER — WAYS OF THINKING

*Beth Roy*

*Shelby Morgan*

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Fundamental to the practice of Radical Psychiatry, and to its power to heal, is a way of thinking that is dynamic and holistic. To describe that way of thinking, we must talk about Marxism.

Only in America is Marxism so excluded from the discussion of ideas. Elsewhere in the world, it is a living body of thought, actively debated, frequently revised, used differently by different people for different purposes. In Ronald Reagan's United States, however, Marxism is a dirty word. It is used as the major euphemism for totalitarianism, for “the enemy,” for evil itself. As a result, we have little access to a major current in modern thought. Even when we use Marxist concepts, we may not know that we do so.

Radical Psychiatry is a case in point. The theory and practice of Radical Psychiatry draw deeply at the well of Karl Marx's philosophy. Marxism, being both a theory about reality and a method of thinking, provides tools to help people analyze their behavior and increase their options for change.

Marxism is one of several approaches to the world that came together to form the fundamental theory of Radical Psychiatry. In the late 1960s, R.D. Laing was writing vivid descriptions of personal mystification, how an individual's sane experience of reality is seen as madness by a mad society. Feminists were joining together in consciousness-raising groups and discovering that their private hells were shared by many; what seemed a “neurotic inability to adjust” behind the locked door of a suburban home became a revolutionary critique of sexism when multiplied many times over. The Growth Movement, and particularly Eric Berne with his theory of Transactional Analysis, contributed therapeutic tools to challenge psychiatry's oppressive equation of malcontent with mental illness.

In this exciting synthesis of ideas, Marxism had an important role to play. Certain concepts developed by Marx in a political context paralleled ideas in the new discussion of psychology: alienation, for instance, was a key approach to personal experience in the work of R.D. Laing. Radical Psychiatrists, examining the ways in which sexism affected personal lives and transactions, quickly became interested in power, and found discussions of the concept in the work of Marxists that both confirmed and advanced their thinking. Many of these ideas met each other while advancing from two directions: the personal, fueled by a quest for personal change, and the political, activated by a desire to change a society which appeared increasingly to treat people unjustly. In other words, Radical Psychiatrists adopted ideas about power and alienation, not because they were a part of a Marxist package, but because they described experiences they themselves were having, and because they added a crucial dimension of understanding to psychological concepts. Many Radical Psychiatrists do not embrace Marxism as a world view, but do find Marxist methods of enormous assistance in doing therapy.

What we seek to do in this chapter is to spell out the concrete ways in which Marxism helps us to do therapy by describing how we do three things:

1. Look for the material reasons for behavior and ideas;
2. Think dialectically; and
3. Understand what is happening in the present in the context of individual and social history.

## **MATERIALISM VS. IDEALISM**

The concept of materialism is a cornerstone of Marx's thinking. Materialism is the notion that all human behavior, including ideas, values, attitudes and feelings, grow out of the concrete conditions and events of people's lives. Idealism, on the other hand, proposes that there are ideas which stand outside the context of time and place — in other words, that ideas can exist independently from what goes on in the real world. Truth, for instance, might be held to be an absolute concept, which holds good universally, under any conditions. "Lying is bad" is an example of a notion which many people believe to be true. Children are taught that "Honesty is the Best Policy;" should they slip, Pinocchio's fate threatens to befall them, and reveal their shame to the world.

A materialist might agree that lying is sometimes "bad," or at least a mistake. It can make problems between people who are trying to be cooperative with each other, for instance. On the other hand, the materialist would be likely to place the ideal of honesty in a context. It does not pay to be honest with someone who has more power than you do, and whose interest is in conflict with yours. To tell the boss honestly that you went to the beach instead of to the doctor is not necessarily the best policy at all. Is lying a "bad" thing for an El Salvadorean guerrilla to do to a government military commander? When children lie to their parents, sometimes they are simply being wise: It is clearly the best policy for a child who knows she will be spanked if she is caught helping herself to the cookies to accuse the dog of having eaten them. In other words, a materialist asks the question: What actual needs and conditions gave rise to this idea, and how do other conditions alter the idea?

### **Materialism in Radical Psychiatry**

In problem-solving groups which use Radical Psychiatry theory, the process of connecting ideas with everyday realities is a very important one. When Samantha came to group, for instance, to work on what she described as an eating disorder, she was asked to describe what the actual problem was.

"I binge," she said. "I eat in self-destructive ways as an expression of my self-hatred." She speaks of two ideas, self-destructive ways and self-hatred, as if they have very real meaning.

"Give an example of a binge."

"Well, yesterday, I went to the grocery store and bought two pounds of yogurt-covered raisins and a box of cookies, and I ate every last bit of both."

"And what was the problem?"

"I felt a little sick and I wasn't hungry for a good meal, which my body probably needed. But more important, I was being self-destructive."

Samantha has a couple of notions here which are abstract: that she has a disease called "eating disorder," and that her eating is self-destructive. Her thinking is a good example of idealism, because she assumes that bingeing is always self-destructive.

It turned out that there had been some compelling reasons for Samantha to have hit the sweets: "I had worked for eight hours without a lunch break in my classroom. It was raining and the kids were wild and demanding. I had two phone conversations with parents who didn't like something I had said about their

kids. When I got home, the toilet was clogged up, and I couldn't reach the landlord. That was when I decided to chuck it, and went to the grocery store." It seemed clear to everyone, eventually including Samantha, that her impulse had not been self-destructive at all. She had needed nurturing, and had found it in yogurt-covered raisins and cookies. To be sure, she needed other ways to be nurtured that were more effusive, kinder to her body, more enduring. But her act of eating was neither "disordered" nor "self-destructive."

## History of Materialism

Karl Marx was a materialist, as were many other thinkers of the industrial age. In the Middle Ages, the existence of feudal societies depended on unquestioned acceptance of certain idealist truths, handed down from generation to generation without question: that God ordained the power of royalty and Church, and that ordinary folk were fated to their positions in life; i.e., peasants tilled the land. These "Eternal Truths," or what we would call idealist beliefs, interfered with the development of scientific thought. The Church insisted, for instance, that the earth was the center around which the heavens revolved. Galileo discovered that it was the earth which turned, and the Church imprisoned and brutalized him to suppress his new evidence.

Despite the power of the Church, materialism gained in prominence, because it was a method of thinking which was useful to the newly developing technology of industrialism. Rapid change, the discovery of new lands, the exploration for raw materials, the invention of new tools for manufacturing, demanded a changed world view. The idealist belief, for instance, that serfs were born to their station in life and would be damned if they left the land, conflicted with the need for a new urban work force. Industrialization required a weakening of the ideological as well as the economic power of Church and monarchy. The philosophy of materialism grew from the needs and experiences of the time, a process which in itself is testament to the validity of the concept of materialism.

## Freud and Idealism

While a materialist approach is a development of modern industrial times, it is in fact applied with inconsistency. Materialism is a fundamental cornerstone of scientific thought in our age. Yet it is rarely applied to the study of psychology. Freud's work, for instance, is at its root idealist.<sup>8</sup> An example is his assumption that some "abnormal behavior" is related to an unresolved Oedipal complex: "...the child's two primal wishes (i.e. to slay his father and marry his mother) (the) insufficient repression or...re-awakening (of which) forms the nucleus of perhaps all neuroses."<sup>9</sup> In this concept are several ideas which stand outside time and beyond evidence: that all children are sexually attracted to their opposite-sex parent, an experience which is difficult or impossible to remember as adults; that individuals who fail to resolve this attraction by "sufficient repression" may suffer subsequent aberrant behavior; and finally that behavior which is aberrant is neurotic (implying undesirability). An observable consequence (behavior which deviates from the acceptable) is here attributed to an event the evidence for which lies in the lost recesses of childhood memory. To deny the accuracy of this assumption is simply to prove that the Oedipal experience remains repressed. The basic idealist assumptions are therefore unprovable and beyond dispute, not unlike the religious concept of sin. Freud replaced the idealistic medieval view that demons caused aberrant behavior with the idealistic Victorian view that insufficiently repressed sexuality causes mental illness.

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<sup>8</sup> In Chapter 14 we present an elaborated comparison of psychodynamic theory and Radical Psychiatry.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Basic Writings*, Modern Library, 1938, p. 908.

## Finding the Materialist Basis

Samantha's thinking about her problems is idealist in nature: she is convinced that she eats in order to damage herself. The idea that she wants to hurt herself causes her to feel scared and depressed, and then she eats more. The more she binges, the more convinced she is that her original assumption is correct: she eats what is not good for her body, therefore she acts self-destructively, and bingeing is caused by her self-destructive inclinations.

“What were you in fact thinking and feeling while you ate the raisins and cookies yesterday?” we ask.

“I was exhausted and frustrated. I wanted something sweet, quick and easy. They tasted good, and it was the first thing all day that felt good, even though I knew at the time it was wrong to eat them. I kept saying to myself, 'Just one more and then I'll cook myself a proper meal.' But I didn't really want to cook, I just wanted to sit in front of the TV and eat sweet things.”

According to the evidence of Samantha's own words, she is eating, not to hurt herself, but to nurture herself. She has sought out something that is easy to obtain that gives her pleasure. Her body may indeed suffer in the long run, but she has confused that result with her motivation for acting, a confusion which sprang from an idea others had told her: that bingeing is self-destructive behavior. She does in fact have a problem, or, more accurately, several problems: she needs more nurturing, literally more “sweetness” in her life. She works too hard, has too little relief. She hasn't the energy after her grueling work-day to cook for herself. In addition, having eaten sweets and nothing else, she is more tired the next day, less able to solve the problems on the original list. Eating so many raisins and cookies is not, in the abstract, a problem. If Samantha's body were well nourished and her spirit well cared for, it might be a treat to gorge on sweets now and then. In part, it is her accusatory way of thinking about her eating behavior that helps to create new problems.

## Paranoia and the Kernel of Truth

How Radical Psychiatry treats paranoia (see Chapter 8) springs directly from our philosophy of materialism, and it contrasts sharply with the idealism reflected in the approach of traditional psychiatry.

The latter views paranoia as a clinical condition, a clear symptom of mental illness. To Radical Psychiatrists, however, paranoia is the consequence of heightened awareness. We are convinced that paranoia is a form of intuition, or observation of non-verbal data, and that it is always a response to something real. When the truth of the intuition is not obvious, or when we are lied to about the truth, then we create explanations to explain what we have intuited. Those explanations may be wrong. In fact, the longer the kernel of truth in the paranoia is denied, the wilder and more convoluted our explanations become, until the paranoia may sound mad. The Radical Psychiatry approach to paranoias is to insist, therefore, that the truth be told, that the person to whom a paranoia is addressed find and state the kernel of truth. When that happens, the paranoia usually vanishes, all the “insane” invention evaporating in the face of honest validation.

Nell called this morning, breathlessly terrified. A frequenter of mental hospitals, lonely and impoverished, she had tried to call the Women's Building to get help finding emergency housing. She dialed information and was given a number.

“I know I'm being harassed,” she exclaimed. “I called that number and got a recording. It sounded like women who – you know – do things with men... I think they were hookers... they sounded just

terrible. And they knew it was me calling, because at the end they even said, in this terrible, facetious tone of voice, ‘And in case you were confused, this is not the number for the Women’s Building.’”

A perfect candidate for institutionalization, you might think.

“What was the number, Nell?” I asked. She told me and I reached for my phone book.

Sure enough, listed under the Women’s Building were a series of numbers for different groups housed there, and the very first was the number Nell had been given. It belonged to a satiric theater group called Les Nickettes, and their wickedly humorous message (when later I heard it) was exactly as Nell had described it. I told her what was going on, and she immediately returned to a “normal” state, much relieved that the harassment was political and not personal.

Had I proceeded from the assumption of traditional psychiatry, that Nell is mentally ill and that her distinct paranoia is a symptom of her disease (a series of idealist concepts), I would probably not have looked in the phone book — or if I had it would have been for the number of the nearest mental hospital. But I assumed that there was some problem with the number Nell had called, that there was a material basis for her admittedly wacked-out conclusion. Treated like a sane human being, she in fact returned hastily to a state of rationality. Traditional psychiatry, however, promotes a circle in the opposite direction: believing without substantiation that paranoia is an illness, the psychiatrist treats people as if their paranoias have no basis in fact, and therefore he fails to find the kernel of truth, the real events to which the paranoia is a sane response. Treated as mad, people do in fact become more and more mad, thereby proving the psychiatrist correct. The tragic consequence springs from the paradox: Belief that paranoia is an unreal ideation does not permit the one act, validation, which would provide evidence of the falseness of the original belief. How ironic that a false idea is used to invalidate the truth of another idea grounded in reality.

## **DIALECTICS VS. LINEAR THINKING**

A second characteristic of Radical Psychiatry is that we think in a way that is called *dialectical*. Dialectics are based on the notion that any understanding of reality is made up of a number of different strands, some of which contradict others. “Logical” thinking which tries to march from point A to point B in a straight line must exclude all the complexities — the sense of process, of how things change over time and within changed contexts. A dialectical view of reality instead allows contradictory facts to interact with each other, and to produce a conclusion which no single line of thought alone would have suggested.

It is a paradox that many of the same currents in history that produced materialism—in particular, industrialization’s need for a science of physical phenomena—also discouraged dialectical thinking and encouraged its opposite, linearity. The word “linear” means going in a straight line. To think in a linear way is to construct a chain of arguments, each one deriving from the one before and ending in a conclusion. It is a useful tool in mathematics and the physical sciences.

Even in math and science, however, the idea that reality can be represented by a straight line of conclusions does not actually hold true. When Newton wanted to describe gravity, the old linear mathematics did not work. He invented a new system called calculus, based on different assumptions to account for the newly observed facts. Other mathematics, such as that used in quantum mechanics, have been created more recently to describe newly discovered atomic phenomena.

Linear thinking does not allow for contradictions. The number two always represents the same quantity; two plus two are always four. Basic rules can be relied upon: two plus three are the same as three plus two,

for example. Linear mathematics would fall apart if two plus three did not equal three plus two under certain circumstances. Linear thinking is adequate where conditions are simple. Where they are not, in conditions of relativity for instance, three plus two do not in fact necessarily equal two plus three and linear math is not useful.

Marx disagreed with a linear view of history and economics. Instead he relied upon a dialectical method of thinking which had been articulated by Hegel. The dialectic describes several characteristics of reality:

**1. Everything changes.** It is the impulse of our media-bound culture to pretend to capture reality in a moment and to codify it: “Coke Is Better.” “Communism Is Bad.” “Motherhood Is Good.” “Alcoholism Is a Disease.” Nowhere is it considered that motherhood may have been different, better, worse, or otherwise fifty years ago than it is now. Linear thinking tends to view reality as static rather than dynamic. A corollary is that dialectical thinking sees everything as a composite of its past and its present: everything has a history, and that history is a part of what it is in the here and now. “Truth,” too, our ideas of which are materially rooted, changes constantly.

**2. Reality is contradictory.** Meanings change, therefore, depending on the context. Bill considers himself to have a learning disability. It is true that his nervous system works in such a way that he reads books slowly. In the context of a school system which relies almost entirely on the written word, he is in fact disabled. But when he walks in the forest, he has a high level of skill: he notes and understands and remembers every nuance of flower and animal. In the context of the forest, he is not in the least learning-disabled. His perceptual apparatus works in contradictory ways: acutely in the world, blurrily when addressing the written word. That contradiction determines whether or not he is learning-disabled depending entirely upon the context.

**3. Everything is connected.** Changes and contradictions happen in relationship to each other. Ruth wants Sara to like her, is nervous in Sara's presence, and speaks softly. Sara is irritated by Ruth's little voice, and is curt with her. Ruth, who elsewhere may be self-assured, stumbles over her words. Sara, who under other conditions may be warm and friendly, becomes more distant. Ruth concludes Sara is cold; Sara decides Ruth is dumb. Neither sees the connection between herself and the other. Neither is the person she would be in the absence of the other. Who each is at this moment is intricately connected with who the other is.

## Combating The Pig with Dialectics

One major way the concept of dialectics is used in Radical Psychiatry is through the concept of fighting Internalized Oppression, or the Pig (see Chapter 5). The ideology of the Pig relies on the absence of dialectical scrutiny. We are taught false notions about ourselves and the world from the time we are infants. We learn to believe that we are lazy, stupid, ugly, sick, bad, crazy and deserve to die. Each of these ideas is an abstraction (lazy when? why? by whose definition?), an absolute, exempt from time and place, without history or context.

In short, the Pig speaks in an idealist tongue. By the very nature of its being, it invades our psyches with the value-system of our society. The method is the message: there is no room for contradiction or change; things stand in static isolation. What we learn is to distrust ourselves and our peers, to view the world as lone individuals bound to a code of rules which determine how we are supposed to behave and what we can and, more importantly, cannot expect from others.

“The Pig” is shorthand for the notion of Internalized Oppression. The very structure of the thought process of the Pig is the vehicle by which we internalize it. Its emphatic, ahistoric formulation is a warning against critical examination. It will not tolerate scrutiny, for its function is to oppress, and it carries into the interior of our heads all the authority of those outside us with power to be oppressive.

We live in an age when discreet coercion is the preferred mode of wielding power. Why would most of us remain docilely in lives that make us neither happy nor secure, if we did not think a whole set of thoughts that induce us to stay in line? If we lived in a society where a man stood at the door with a gun, we would know clearly the nature of our coercion. If we lived in a time when options did not exist, when the tribe was isolated and the roots there to be gathered, we would need no coercion. But we live in a complex society, where some prosper and others don't. We are taught that anyone can rise to prosperity, and that failure to do so is a personal failure: the black unemployed teenage boy is unemployed because he is too lazy, angry, stubborn, stupid; if he'd clean up his act, he too could become a lawyer. We may see through this argument in its extreme, when it is applied to a teenager-of-color. But what about ourselves? Who among us does not suffer a sneaking doubt that we would be richer, more respected, better loved, if only we worked a bit harder, were more talented, smarter, thinner? Free of that doubt might we not challenge the inequalities of our world more ardently and more successfully?

If the Pig thinks linearly, intuition is a good example of a dialectical form of thinking. Intuition notices complex and contradictory evidences, and leaps to a recognition of reality which could not be perceived by any piece of evidence in isolation. Mary notes that Susan's shoulders slump, her voice is lackluster, her smile is strained. Susan says, “I love you and I am happy to see you.” But her manner does not seem happy or, if loving, very energetically so. Mary sees Susan's behavior of the moment and Mary's knows something of Susan from the past: that Susan infrequently complains when she is ill or depressed, that she worries about burdening her lover. Mary computes all she knows and has an intuition: that Susan isn't well and isn't talking. A linear view of the situation might be: she says she is happy; I perceive that she is unhappy; therefore I am crazy. The dialectical view, however, observes the inconsistencies, roams over past and present, respects the emotional response of the observer, and comes to a very different conclusion.

## Dialectical Materialism and Human Nature

As thinking creatures, capable of self-reflection, we all have opinions about who we are. Our views of ourself are made up of our personal experiences, plus our ideas about human nature: the immutable characteristics which come along with having been born human. Often, these thoughts take the form of: “Well, that's just the way I am.” The hidden belief is: “I always have been, and I always will be.” Prevailing views of human nature thus carry in them the idea that change is unlikely if not impossible. If I wasn't “born that way”, then I certainly “became that way” at such an early age that I can do nothing about it.

Psychological theories tend to incorporate and articulate assumptions about human nature. Freudians describe the id, the very existence of which is an unproven and reified assumption, as being inherently greedy and selfish. This line of reasoning led Freud finally to believe that war and violence were inevitable aspects of human nature:

...men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved...; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their

aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him...<sup>10</sup>

Radical Psychiatry has a very different approach to the discussion of human nature. We agree that people develop seemingly enduring qualities. But we see these qualities as a result of the individual's history and her continuing interaction with the environment. Simply stated, who we are at our core — our feelings, values, thoughts and attitudes — is formed by what we do, by our relationship to others, to our work, to our position in society. Aggression, for example, is the result, not of human nature, but of competition in a context of real inequalities and scarcities (see Chapter 6). How we behave in turn influences and shapes others, who influence and shape us. It is a dialectical process.

Because Radical Psychiatrists think in terms of this interplay between me and them, between now and then, between here and there, we seek to effect change by working both on the structure of our lives, that which is outside us, and on the role we play, that which is internal. We are optimistic about the future and about the prospect for improvement in the quality of our lives, because we know that each change we make as individuals changes our world, and in turn changes us again.

## **THE VALUE OF HISTORY**

To view processes in this dialectical way leads directly to an historical approach. In every moment resides the past as well as the future.

An analysis of history is a key part of Marxist thinking. Each stage of history is seen to be an organic, dialectical outgrowth of the ones preceding it. Societies are organized in a way which facilitates survival with the tools at hand. Feudalism relies on agriculture and is organized to insure its continuation. The very success of the system makes possible a surplus production of cotton, which then promotes the development of a system of manufacturing to turn cotton into cloth. The new needs of manufacturing in turn require a new technology, industrialization, which creates its own demand for a reorganization. Once capitalism succeeds, it quickly generates its own obsolescence, for the prospect of a world with enough food and shelter for all promotes a need for a social system of equality and cooperation. Thus, each stage of society arises within the old structure, and in turn gives rise to the future.

As with societies, so it is with individuals. This view of people placed in the context of their past is an enormously useful tool of therapy. How much easier it is to change the present if we understand how we got here. How much more consciously we can choose our futures if we see them as an outgrowth of our pasts.

Our historical view gives us humility about our assumptions. We do not “know” that a client is treating us in the way she treated or wanted to treat her father. We do know that she has experienced problems elsewhere in her life and has learned some things to expect and some ways to behave. She may or may not be bringing that past learning to bear at the moment.

The view that we have learned from our past experiences and carry with us as attitudes and opinions is enormously empowering because it implies that we are still learning, and can learn new and different ways that are more effective than what we've known in the past. If we are the finished creatures of a far-distant and forgotten past that crafted our psyches, then we are prisoners of what we cannot relive. History is not

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<sup>10</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, W. W. Norton, 1961, pp. 58-59; see also Freud's correspondence with Albert Einstein.

baggage from which we must unburden ourselves, but part of a process of continuing, although contradictory and dialectical, growth.

John's marriage is in trouble. John may have learned in the past to cover up his feelings, because it was a smart strategy: his father praised him for being "a little man," his mother was overwhelmed with her own problems and was unable to deal with his. Today his woman-partner accuses him of sexism: being "out-of-touch with his feelings" now no longer serves his best interest, although it once did. He is not "a sexist," although he can benefit from undoing some learned behavior which is the result of one way men and women are trained differently in our sexist culture. The view of John in the context of his past is a kindly and nurturing one, productive of motivation to change. He is imprisoned neither by his past, nor by a static "Pig" view of his current behavior. Our materialist, dialectical, historical view of John points to a materialist, dialectical, historical solution to his present problem.

If we did not think materially, dialectically and historically, our work in its essence would be other. Marxism, then, is one important source of direction in our practice, and a core set of concepts in our theory.

