THERAPY IN LATE CAPITALISM

by Joel Kovel

A radical approaching the institution of psychotherapy often feels inclined to impale it with a barb updated from Marx's judgment on religion: where once was the opium of the people, here stands their heroin, a new, synthetic addiction, concocted out of the brew of late capitalist culture. The hostility is understandable, since therapy has in some respects been even more successful than religion in deflecting energy from the need for radical social change. Religion at least threatened capital with its immanent critique; like a superannuated retainer it reminded its master of a time when his power had not yet come to be, and therefore of one when it would pass away. Therapy, on the other hand, appears seamless: even when pretending to be transcendent, the reward it dangles is no eschatological grappling with ultimates but an ultimately mundane, "sensible" happiness, quite eligible for commodification. What is needed is a concrete and precise analysis of the manysidedness of the phenomenon, situating it within the totality of its society and drawing attention to its liberating elements. In short, we must unearth the latent critical content of therapy and set it against its more obvious conformism.

Therapy, however, does not exist apart from the neurosis it is supposed to remedy. The relationship is dialectical, for just as the variants of psychotherapy arise in response to the actually existing forms of neurosis, so do they serve to label, identify and ground neurotic experience in their own terms. Further, neither therapy nor neurosis should be seen as remote from the entire flux of capitalist relations in everyday life, within the family, or in mass culture. Despite the reciprocal relation of neurosis and therapy, it is necessary to begin our analysis from the standpoint of the disorder, neurosis, rather than from the remedy, therapy. We do not choose to be neurotic, but we choose to do something about our neuroses—to ignore them, to subsume them in some kind of activity, to seek therapeutic help for them—or some combination of all these. Thus although neuroses enter the realm of political activity—usually, as we shall discuss below, in a negative way—therapy (or no therapy) is in itself a political act and can only be grasped in relation to the material conditions it seeks to alter.

Objectively we understand a neurotic person to be failing in tasks of adaptation to the environment through the compulsive repetition of inappropriate behaviors. But what makes the behaviors inappropriate is another, subjective dimension of compulsion: the intrusion of incompletely

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repressed fantasy. Every neurosis then can be considered a structure grounded in a nodal point in subjectivity and extending beyond the individual to encompass the entirety of his social relations. And at the subjective point of origin, a state of desire, hatred and fear emerges that is intolerable to the self and against which the most elaborate measures have to be taken. These measures, whose nature is socially determined, form the behavioral surface of the neurosis.

It might be helpful at this point to distinguish between two categories of neurotic experience, the normal and the clinical. Normal neurosis may be roughly identified with the neurotic character; it is the standard pattern of neurotic experience imposed by the established conflicts of everyday life, and adapted to them. The normal neurotic pays little attention to his characteristic rigidity and irrationality, for this is the way one is supposed to be. Thus his inner subjective compulsion becomes cloaked in the veil of common sense. Neurosis becomes clinical, by which is meant potentially treatable, when the individual becomes aware of a certain intolerable degree of suffering and-or is made to feel that his disturbance lies outside the perimeter of what is socially acceptable. These two functions—the felt suffering and the label of deviance—are tightly but not necessarily coupled. When we feel clinically neurotic (by becoming grossly depressed, suffering through some repetitive pattern of failure in love, or developing some classical symptom such as a phobia), we are generally experiencing more of the subjective imbalance and compulsiveness that is the essence of neurosis. At the same time we are judging this worsened state of affairs in accordance with standards of well-being internalized from the culture. These factors, each culturally rooted, develop along separate paths that meet on the field of neurosis. One may be severely neurotic yet be considered normal so long as he or she lives within the parameters of what is acceptable. Similarly, a person may be labelled neurotic—and accept the labelling as valid—when the degree of subjective neurosis is actually outweighed by distress stemming from objective social forces. In this society at least, virtually everybody suffers to some degree from normal neurosis. Indeed, just as capitalism universalizes the commodity relationship, so does it impose, in a quite necessarily related way, a universalized neurotic experience among those who must live according to its terms.

In order to ground this insight we need to demonstrate first, that conditions of life under capitalism necessarily lead to neurosis; second, that the forms of neurosis bear a definite relationship to the historically evolving relations of capitalist production; and finally, that the presence of neurotic structures in the population plays an actual role in the evolution of capitalism itself. Note that it is not being argued that capitalism creates neurosis as such. Such a thesis would be just as one-sided and inadequate as its vulgar-Freudian converse, that neurosis is generated out of fixed biological dispositions. It is necessary to recognize that inherent dispositions exist which, if not strictly
biological, are at least transhistorical and thus universal: infantile helplessness, the need for attachment and separation, the unstructuredness of instinctual drives and the potential for ambivalence. These characteristics are, after all, what make us human: they give rise to fantasy, symbolism, and subjectivity and value itself; and they put the human in a state of tension with nature, leading to that transformation of the natural, given order which comprises the basic dialectic of civilization. Moreover, they give rise to neurosis as well—but never in themselves, only as they are twisted against a definite social order and turned inward, bearing the imprint on its particular forms. Neurosis is living proof of the tension between the human subject and the objective social order; it only comes into existence so far as these are incongruent, which is to say, within history.

The social conditions in which neurotic development can flourish are those of domination, of a social fabric composed of conflicting groups organized along lines of class, sex, race, etc., and where the division of labor reflects the power of one group over others. In such a setting, insofar as the production of a surplus allows a passage beyond brute necessity, the contradictions between what the social order is and what it can be will eventually settle within the self as one form of neurotic distortion or another. The description just given can, of course, fit nearly every form of social order, and if capitalism is only one among all other social orders so far as generating madness goes, it has nonetheless managed to produce a rather unique form of neurosis, one which reflects the peculiarities of its history.²

A most striking feature of neurosis within capitalism is its ubiquity. The reason for this lies in the particular form of reality principle developed by capital—the fetishism of commodities. The commodity relation is, of course, predicated on the creation of objects of exchange, and of a universal standard, money, by means of which their value may be compared. As Marx consistently pointed out, to place something into a system of exchange means that it has to be abstracted and objectified—i.e., placed within a rationalized and calculable context. But this necessarily implies that the commodity relation must also include the creation and sustenance of a subject who performs the exchanging—a subject who, first, possesses a universal standard of objective rationality by means of which he can attend to the existence and exchange of objective commodities; and second, who is unable to perceive that these commodities are other than what they seem to be—i.e., who is prepared to accept their fetishization within the dominant system of value and exchange.

The neurotic individual, normal or clinical, fits the bill exactly by virtue of the split between the deeper layers of his subjectivity and his internalization of the rationalized reality principle of abstract commodity logic. What makes a

². The question of the extent to which it applies to already established socialist orders is an important one which will have to be deferred for now.
person neurotic is not hate or fear *per se*, but intrasubjective conflict between the demands of reason and those of desire. A social order, like capitalism, that imposes a universal imperative of rationalization will therefore universalize neurosis, for the simple reason that desire cannot go its own way to work out idiosyncratic solutions, but must be forever hurled against rationalization. In precapitalist society, people were amply crazy—the degree of brutal traumatization and privation saw to that. But there was no category of neurosis in which they all had to be inserted, precisely because there was no universal standard of reason in terms of which their madness appeared as negativity.

It would, however, greatly flatten out the historical process to confine capital's role in neurosis to the mere imposition of instrumental rationality. For one thing, we must always bear in mind that what capital has imposed in the way of reason contains the severest contradictions even on an objective level. And for another, we would miss much of what capitalism is about if we overlook its role in restructuring and marketing desire and impulse themselves. The contradictions within reason as well as the new forms of desire (new needs) each enter into the history of neurosis. More, they become elements in the development of capitalist society. In order to grasp this flux, however, it is necessary to consider two moments within capitalist development which represent the early and contemporary phases of its trajectory and which reveal themselves in developments in personal life having to do with the altered nature of work and consumption.

In the early phase of capitalism, most of its energy went into the production and accumulation of commodities. This process required the transformation of productive activity into abstractable labor power. The alienation which resulted cost the individual control of his vital activity and made his productive capacity into a commodity that could not only be bought and sold, but was also subject to an inexorable process of domination by capital. Yet, alienation stopped short of the subjective world itself, except insofar as this became stunted through separation from the means of existence. And this was not due to any grace on capital's part, but simply to the fact that the inner sphere had only been partially developed as an organ of capitalist relations. It mattered little what subjective variations obtained within the time of labor's activity. From the standpoint of capital what counted was the simple reproduction of the work force and its controlled delivery, like so many draft animals, to the work place. Around this need there arose a religion and culture of asceticism, submission and a crude, severe rationalization.

To assist the reproduction of labor, a family structure was emphasized that would generate an ample supply of fresh children to take up the slack of increased commodity production and which would moreover keep these children under control. For this latter function a line had to be maintained between the patriarchal dominators at the top of the social pyramid and their symbolic representative, the father within the family; this line passed through
the individual conscience and bound each man and woman of society to church, state, and ultimately, capital.

The basic work relation of early capitalism, the abstraction and expropriation of labor-time, becomes even more expansive within the social world of late capitalist relations. Its forms become greatly complicated by subsequent developments in the relations of production. As capital proceeds down the self-ordained path of growth for its own sake and not for humanity's, it necessarily expands its productive power past the point at which simple accumulation serves its purposes. We may summarize these developments as the addition of a moment of disaccumulation—i.e., of the liquidation of surplus—occurring pari passu with the continuing expansion of the productive process.3

This occurs at a point of transition, developing in an uneven manner across the Western world towards the close of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, a phase during which machinery and the technical apparatus in general—fixed capital—outstrips the productive role of human labor—living capital. And as the machine takes over, writes Marx, "Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process, rather the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself. (What holds for machinery holds likewise for the combination of human activities and the development of human intercourse)"4 (my italics). And again, "In this transformation, it is...the appropriation of his own general productive power,...in a word, the development of the social individual [my italics] which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth. The theft of alien labor-time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large scale industry itself."5

Two dialectically intertwined trends are intensified by the development of the social individual as a prime instrument of capitalist relations. Appearing in the unitary moments of production and consumption, they eventually come to reside within the subject, defining a "human nature" which is neurotic in capitalist terms.

From the side of production the social individual is a creature whose work becomes increasingly differentiated and remote from any comprehensible productive process. These trends are manifest in the rise of technocracy, the bureaucratization of work and, of particular concern for our analysis, the immense development of service occupations. Increasingly, work becomes the cultivation and delivery of human relations themselves. And from these qualities it follows that human relations become technical, swaddled in instrumental logic and prepared for commodification. Rather than being freed by the development of science and productivity, labor becomes

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5. Ibid.
degraded owing to the entrapment of productive reason within capitalist imperatives. The “watchman and regulator” of the production process becomes just another instrument within it: the human becomes mechanical and accordingly assumes a machine-like form of reason to the terms of which all living relations become subsumed.

Meanwhile the pace of production and the hunger for profit impose equally far-reaching alterations in consumption. What could be assumed automatically in an age of scarcity and accumulation becomes both more problematic and more compelling in light of disaccumulation. Now there is a surplus to be sold, though it is not to be simply disposed of, but simultaneously wasted and revalued so that capital keeps moving. The consumerist imperative in late capital demands the cultivation of new forms of desire, and this desire is to develop intertwined with the equally contradictory moment of rationality.

Capital no longer regards the social individual as a mere means, but rather as a means to be actively controlled with all the forces at its disposal. Indeed the contestation for the soul of the social individual—whether fought out on the field of daily life, in mass culture, or, as we shall touch upon shortly, therapy—has become a principle political struggle of advanced industrial society. It is a contest which complicates, perhaps decisively, all previous forms of class struggle. The measures capital has undertaken in order to undercut the immanent threat from the very reason and desire it itself has brought forth into the world define in a broad sense these new forms of struggle. The twisting of reason into instrumental logic and the fetishization of desire are only the most general ways of viewing these “remediations.” Their effect has been to create new kinds of social battlegrounds. The fracturing of modern society demands a series of analyses of the specific forms taken by the contest for the social individual, whether these be advertising, education, bureaucratic rationalization—or, as we shall now consider, the subjective life itself.

The changes we have been describing take place within the historical development of the institutions of everyday life, the most critical of which is the family. The family becomes crucial because, in its attempt to fulfill its assigned function of reproducing the individual demanded by the social order, it succeeds mainly by transmitting the contradictions developed within that order into the spheres of personal life. The need of capital for a “social individual” is another way of saying that capital must intensify and enter into the terms of family life. The space for this was cleared out by the productive surge of late capitalism. As the moment of disaccumulation was reached, the demand for labor-time began to drop below the level at which child labor was needed. Meanwhile the practice had come to seem odious, owing to the

progressive development of the reformist impulse during the nineteenth century. The combination of these factors led to the abolition of child labor in late capitalism and the freeing up of childhood as a separate period. This was essential, for only a child can develop differentiated desire, and only a child can be trained for rationality, an enterprise which was undertaken by general public education.

Alongside of this occurred a rapid decline in infant mortality as the result of advances in sanitation and public health. Thus, children came to stay around long enough to be valued and cultivated; and, as their labor was no longer necessary as it was in peasant or early industrial society, they emerged into the disaccumulation phase as a whole new class of consumers, the satisfaction of whom became a new task for the family. A related development was the dissociation of sexuality from reproduction, which freed the former as a source of pleasure and desire. Meanwhile, family life was being buffeted about as a result of the increasing erosion of traditional sources of legitimacy. With the advance of alienation the family became a personal refuge for great masses of people who could otherwise find neither meaning, gratification nor power within community life. Yet, the cultural ties between the individual family and the larger community were becoming ever more attenuated, thus depriving personal relations of a coherent social framework. Authority itself became more and more impersonal and decreasingly mediated by kinship community.

As a result, people looked for something within the family only to be frustrated. For the father, promised authority by virtue of his cultural heritage, yet denied it everywhere, family life became not the simple dream of a paterfamilias, but a hoax. For the mother, denied authority by phallic culture, she now unwittingly acquired the burden of becoming Mom—inculcating the categories of childhood, assuaging the hurts of her increasingly impotent husband and passively transmitting the values of consumerism as though they were instilled into her very milk. At the same time, the split of sex from reproduction opened up for her—even more than for the male—the possibility for gratification that had long been concealed beneath the triple burdens of domestic toil, childbearing and the ascetic femininity of patriarchal lore. With the masculine monopoly of sexual power becoming seriously eroded from one side, and feminine masochistic submission cracking from the other, the result could only be the release of hostility and guilt into the matrix of the "social individual." And it is the incoming children who inherit this cauldron of emergent hope, pent-up rage, confused longing and incoherent values.

In this context we can appreciate the achievement of Freud, who did no more than map out a subjective terrain that history had brought into view. And it is quite significant that the most prominent features of this landscape were the neuroses—no less significant than Freud's insight that neurotic development was entirely continuous with the normal. The nucleus of Freud's
discovery was no mere residual category—an excretion of bourgeois relations, as Marxists have often claimed. Consider that Freud’s first appreciation of the causes of neurosis lay in the practice of coitus interruptus, an economically necessary yet technically inefficient form of birth control widely practiced at the time. Or that one of his first cases was the adolescent hysterics, Dora, who was enmeshed in a covert erotic situation involving, among other things, rebellion against her father. In these and other instances, the neurosis can be seen as the binding of a potentially liberatory impulse through entrapment in infantile conflict—structures universalized by virtue of the growth of the notion of childhood, and of the contradictory reason and desire embedded within it.

Neurosis is the self-alienation of a subject who has been readied for freedom but runs afoul of personal history—a personal history whose particular terms from childhood on are both individually unique and determined by the general historical process. Neurosis therefore is an auxiliary form of inner domination which reproduces external domination on the realm of the unconscious. It was on this territory that Freud made his authentic achievement: the discovery of the lost infantile body revealed in the qualities of deep subjectivity itself—an infinitely fluid yet irreconcilable language of desire, terror and hatred which peels the boundary of consciousness away from the registration of the material object and drapes it over phantoms of objects lost. To account for repression, Freud needed the hypothesis of instinctual drive, or Trieb—the dialectical non-identity between unconscious fantasy and official, waking thought. And to sustain his realization that repression was a radical process, Freud had to ground the concept of Trieb materially—i.e., the body had to be granted a real and disjunctive input with respect to the demands of culture. While he largely succeeded, Freud remained to some extent trapped in the terminology of the positivist neuropsychiatry whose assumptions he was demolishing. As a result, he left a legacy of difficulty in mediating psychoanalytic concepts with a genuinely historical social theory.

Every system of domination ensures that potential subjective conflict becomes actual—and maddening—through the class imposition of real suffering and deprivation. Capital’s distinctive contribution to this schema was the binding of time through the regimentation of labor-power into an exchangeable commodity. The binding of real time and its eventual translation into the mediating categories of infantile life set forth the principal dichotomy within modern subjectivity: time bound vs. Promethean desire. Add domination and the patriarchal family, and we have the forms of the Oedipus complex under capitalism, which Freud read in his consulting room.

Thus capital ensured the universalization of a normal neurotic structure.

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Quantitative variations—too much infantile trauma, biological variations in resistance, and so forth—would suffice, as had always been the case, to bring out one or another clinical variety of "mental illness." To the extent that such afflicted individuals became unsuited for the social process, they would have to be dealt with in one way or another; and although we know that for centuries the fate of the mad had concerned society, it was also the case that only in the early phases of capital and the Enlightenment, as Foucault pointed out,9 was there any general differentiation between the "mentally disturbed" and the other assorted misfits who had eternally collected around the base of society.

Early capital may have set the stage for neurosis as a category through its industrial binding of time and universalization of reason, but otherwise it had little use for the problem. And this was because its control of the human world was mainly applied at the point of the quantification of labor itself. With the development of the "social individual," however, the essentially qualitative subjective world becomes necessarily an additional object of control, and neurosis finds itself increasingly at the center of culture. In the new order, dominated by technology, service work and the commodification of the human relationship, the way a person behaves on and off the job becomes an essential aspect of the economic process. Thus the presence of neurosis takes on a significance unthinkable in the days of yore, when sturdy backs, sobriety, faith and thrift would fit the bill. But of deeper interest yet is the fact that the structure of the neurotic experience itself is decisively affected by the ways of advanced capital.

In the early phase of capital neurotic discord can be ideal-typically regarded as between an external, directly domimative force that attempts to bind time and an impulse which resists such binding. Since neurotic conflict is never simply between objective and subjective forces, but involves subjective representations of what is real, there must be an inner registration, or internalization, of the external, directly domimative force. Put simply, the individual has to believe that father is there, backed up by God and State, to ward off impulse; and it is his belief in the image of such authority that enters into the neurotic conflict by becoming linked with infantile representations of the same. To continue the model, then, we would say that the suppressing force in early capitalist normal neurosis consists of a more or less direct representation of an actual authority.

In late capitalist neurosis this picture becomes altered by the diminution of direct, immediate authority, whether religious or secular, and its replacement by the instruments for the control of the social individual. This means the installation of an internalized administration of one's own reason and desire. It is essential, however, that the reason which performs this function be of the kind that is instrumental and that fetishizes desire. Otherwise these agencies

would go over to the side of impulse and freedom—i.e., they would lose their legitimating tie to the external administration of capitalist relations.

It is important to note parenthetically that the above argument, while heavily indebted to Marcuse’s “obsolescence of the Freudian view of Man,” departs from it in a significant direction. By converting the regulating systems of the psyche to internalized reproductions of the prevailing administration, Marcuse made one powerful point but lost another, and with it a fully dialectical analysis: he severed too completely the social and the personal orders. By abandoning the concrete mediations of everyday life, the family and psychology, Marcuse unintentionally returns Marxist dialectics toward the economism from which critical theory had tried to rescue it.

In contrast, the analysis developed here seeks to encompass the very non-identity between psyche and society which reflects Adorno’s observation of the actual fracturing of advanced capitalist society. Because of non-identity a space has to be cleared away within the self for a phenomenologically determinable core of self-experience which is mediated by actual social relations, yet which contains the capacity to resist them. In short, the sixth thesis on Feuerbach needs to be amended if it is to become worthy of Marxism: the self is not a simple, Lockean “ensemble of social relations,” but reveals as well the entire Freudian dialectic. The model that emerges is complex yet capable of registering the actual state of contradiction. It includes the fact that essential choices in life have passed into the alienated hands of an impersonal administrative apparatus which attempts to impose unidimensionality upon the human world, but also that the same administration needs to consume the time of a social individual whose personality has been cultivated via the mediations of the family and childhood—a personality locked ineluctably in conflict with the impersonality of the whole.

When one factors out the invariant or trivial elements and arrives at the ultimate historical basis of conflict, it may be seen as the struggle between the inviolable space within the subject and the intrusions of administered necessity. These terms can be mapped into Freud’s formulation of the clash between the sexual instincts and civilization, since it is infantile sexuality, viewed in its fullest sense as Eros, timeless and uncommodified, which constitutes the core of subjectivity left over after all the taming measures have had their due. Nonetheless, the conflict is still experienced by the subject in terms of the actual people—lovers, bosses, co-workers, teachers and toll-takers—who have come to play the crucial mediating roles between Eros and the administration. Without the concrete mediations of everyday life,

there can be no symbolic scaffolding upon which the structures of consciousness, whether false or true, can be built.

The non-reducibility of self-experience to either social demands or biological need is the precondition of neurotic conflict. The conflict itself, then, is always conducted through mental representations of real people which become split and tossed hither and yon as the subject vainly tries to synthesize the opposed trends within him. But for this to be so, the social world has to provide fundamental contradictions of its own such that an inner synthesis cannot be achieved. Thus from the standpoint of whether neurotic development occurs it is all the same if the father exists as an actual suppressing authority or whether he is functionally absent and his power usurped. The form that the neurosis takes may be different of course—in the first instance we might, for example, expect a hysterical flight while in the second the picture is more likely to be some kind of narcissistic or schizoid disturbance—but neurosis will take root in both cases because real objects see to it that desire is both unfulfillable and dangerous.

A person growing up under late capitalism will be materially cared for and educated into instrumental reason regardless of whether he be working or middle class. Prolonged and nurtured childhood will have succeeded in stimulating desire well beyond the possibilities of any controlling structure to discharge or bind. Indeed, the very weakness of immediate parental authority, its steady usurpation by remoter expertise, guarantees that desire is both unchecked and ungratifiable. The parent can neither stop children nor be adequate to their yearning. And, the non-provision of a worthy object becomes just as potent a repressing force as the actual threat of castration. In both instances the subject is left helplessly suffused with hate, at the mercy of desire, and driven to falsify consciousness.

In late capitalism, as throughout the history of the human species, the deeper body of alienated infantile feeling is relegated to the unconscious. However, certain auxiliary measures have been added to channel the highly developed surplus desire which flows into contemporary culture via the social individual. The principle structure which accommodates this process is instrumental reason itself. For all the circumstances which tend to stimulate desire do so under the sign of the reasonable imperative. The little children who learn to be creative in their progressive school learn too that the school is an administered entity in which one gets ahead by being creative (within limits, of course). And if the child is not privileged enough to get the point in such a setting, he will when he goes home and is told by some television ad to “feel free” in the interests of a soft drink.

Advanced capital has worked diligently at colonizing the new subjective territory its advance unearthed. The very usurpation of parental authority which plays so large a role in introducing alienation within the subject is itself a measure of this colonial administration. The parent either joins up—becoming, so to speak, a civil servant in the regime of mass culture—or he is
swept aside to be left screaming in impotent rage, an object of scorn no less than covert yearning.

And like any proper colony, instrumentalized subjectivity provides raw material for the metropolitan region: commodifiable desire. The inchoate longing of childhood bubbles up out of the primary region of self-experience. From earliest infancy it passes through the refinery of instrumental logic as it enters the human world. And there it is named, sorted out, categorized, told—in the fundamental operation of instrumental reason—that it is not part of the subject, that it exists “out there” in abstractable, quantifiable, ultimately commodifiable terms. If, by definition, we term the forms of experience that have been instrumentally severed from subjectivity the secondary symbolic values, and correlative we term that from which they have been severed primary symbolic values, then it may be that secondary symbolic value becomes valued over the primary. Otherwise the figure will become drawn back into the subjective world and out of the clutches of commodity relations—for only secondary symbolic values can be exchanged. It may be that this kind of operation is at the heart of reification.

The simplest notion of the secondary objectification of fantasy in everyday life is the daydream: a controlled exercise in wish-fulfillment whose energy derives from unfulfillable unconscious desire and the objects of which are given by the dominant culture. In this sense capital entails the commodification of daydreams. Such conceptions develop a truth if they are believed in; at least they remain stable enough to enter the marketplace where they acquire a more material grounding. And the developing person comes to believe in them because repression of infantile terror is made the easier thereby; and because, simply, to reify desire makes fulfillment seem nearer, since that which is materializable is also possessable, even on the installment plan.

The same configuration that serves the neurotic character structure becomes increasingly essential for the disposition of the surplus. From this standpoint it would seem that neurotic alienation is necessary in order to develop a primary subjective core which turns out fantasies suitable for skimming by the instruments of capital. The neurosis is the irritant, like the grain of sand to the oyster, that keeps a natural process in a state of chronic disequilibrium and so sustains another dislocation at a different point. Similarly the sludge of secondary symbols accumulated as a result of the endless reification of mass culture obscures the basic disequilibrium even as it irritates it and keeps it going. Thus the various rationalizations which have come to surround neurotic experience in the post-Freudian era have only served to secure the basic neurotic disposition of the times. Were it otherwise, were people either happy or clear about what they wanted, then capital’s ceaseless expansion would be endangered.

In addition to churning out saleable desire for the age of consumerism, neurosis has a number of other basic functions under late capitalism. Neurosis is perhaps the only way one can develop a rationalized subject
suitable for doing the work of the social individual, who at the same time does not know what he or she wants, i.e., whose capacities to resist are compromised. The simultaneous efflorescence of infantile impulse and fear of a non-instrumental expression of the same makes it that much harder for the neurotic to experience outrage over oppression without lapsing into crippling self-doubt. Similarly, though the parricidal nucleus of the Oedipus complex persists as a spur to rebellion, so long as it remains under the ageis of a preponderantly neurotic organization the rebellion will almost surely be self-destructive and lead to a new round of submission. All in all, normal-neurotic character structures are one of the best ways for an oppressive order to maintain its domination without an embarrassing and economically stultifying overt authoritarianism. Further, designating the normal neurosis as one or another category of clinical neurosis both serves the labelling process so dear to instrumental reason and preoccupies people with reified or individualistic explanations for their unhappiness. And when one adds to this highly abbreviated presentation the reflection of how ruinous neurotic bickering and subjectivism have been to Left politics, it will not be hard to see how loyal a servant neurosis has been to its master, capital.

But slaves have been known to turn on their masters. The labelling of "psychopathology" represents, to be sure, one way of forestalling awareness of a fuller truth. But the opportunity to do so only exists because of the actual presence of a colossal burden of neurotic misery in the population, a weight that continually and palpably betrays the capitalist ideology, which maintains that commodity civilization promotes human happiness. If, given all this rationalization, comfort, fun and choice, people are still wretched, unable to love, believe or feel some integrity to their lives, they might also begin to draw the conclusion that something was seriously wrong with their social order. Moreover, the threat posed by neurosis is not limited to the betrayal of ideology. For impulse is antithetical to administration, while neurosis represents a kind of synthesis between the two. But it is a false and uneasy synthesis, owing to the partial breakthrough of impulse and its inherently sluggish educability. Thus the hidden unconscious forms of impulse become ever more threatening, not just to the individual in neurotic distress, but to the social order whose fundamental irrationality has to be cloaked in a film of rationalization. Neurosis is not only unfreedom; it also contains within itself a thrust toward freedom. Clinical neurosis should be regarded as a twisted effort at cure, yet one which still contains somewhere more hope for freedom than the normal neurosis it replaces.

Consequently, the various forms of therapy have arisen as new forms of mediation—re-mediations or remedies—to be inserted into the increasingly uneasy neurotic syntheses. The therapies are in this sense like a kind of mental Keynesianism resorted to by capital to iron out another type of endemic
crisis; and like the economic analogue, they suffer from a tendency to inflation, now manifest in the running riot of a whole Babel of schools.

The concept of what psychotherapy can be has come a long way from Freud's initial insight that making the unconscious conscious may relieve neurotic suffering. It has both retrieved its pre-Freudian roots in suggestion, religious healing and, indeed, shamanism, and branched forward in countless novel directions. In all of these methods, however, one common condition obtains: the individual whose personal distress has been defined as neurosis undergoes an experience in which certain elements of his neurotic structure are reproduced, and as a result he becomes reunited with some portion of his existence that had been denied to him by neurotic splitting. Thus disequilibrium proceeds to re-equilibration; disunity to unification, always under the sign of self-appropriation. The therapies speak then of developing "insight," or of learning "appropriate behavior," of discovering one's "true self," or, as in family therapy, of re-establishing broken and chaotic family communications. The modes under which self-appropriation may occur are exceptionally varied but always involve some element of subjective belief or goal that the therapeutic method validates, as well as some objectification of this in the person of the therapist.

The therapy, then, is the dialogue within which these elements are related to each other. The belief, or value system of the therapy, establishes the vector of self-appropriation, while the actual therapist offers a concrete model for incorporation, a framework around which the self-appropriation can take place. Thus in Freud's method the analyst imposes the value of reflective truth-telling and offers his accepting yet disengaged attention to break the neurotic cycle; while in Jung's version, belief in a transcendent unconscious force is held out and the analyst becomes an active guide promoting symbolic reunification; or in gestalt therapy, immediate contact with current awareness becomes the goal; or in behavioral treatment, altering learned, objectifiable behavior; in transactional analysis, appropriation of a reasonable standard of self-esteem in a group setting; and so forth.

Note that anything can work, at least for a while, in the therapy of a neurosis, so long as it is believed in and backed up with a real therapeutic presence that succeeds in objectively establishing some kind of dialogue with the inner structure of neurosis. The objective factor makes it impossible to airily dismiss the value of some supposed cures as bubbles destined to burst upon disillusionment. Illusions they might be, but no more so than the false consciousness imposed by class domination. While it is true that neurotic contradictions will not be ushered out of existence by therapeutic mumbo-jumbo, this is not the same as claiming that a person will not be convinced that they have subsided.

Of course the two dialectics—the therapeutic and the societal—run together. Indeed it is just the social dimension which provides an essential framework of objectification around which therapeutic goals can crystalize
(e.g., Jungian treatment works best for those whose life has prepared them to accept a religious worldview). Because of the non-identity between individual and society, however, no absolute fit between personal telos and an objectified social framework can be obtained and a great range of partial solutions, each with its own ideology, is possible.

We are thus in a position to attempt a critique of the differing possibilities for therapy according to two criteria: 1. the degree to which they objectively address themselves to the neurosis, as against blurring the realities or indulging in illusions; and 2. the values inherent in the kind of change they offer, both with respect to their respective methods and goals. Are the resistant powers within the subject employed for this end, or does the therapy attempt its unification on terrain that has already been colonized by capital? In other words, does the therapy become an immanent critique or a new form of fetish? Let us turn to a few examples for clarification.

Critiques of inner and outer worlds have to be made in the language of each sphere. Thus therapies which attempt to apply advanced political insights to emotional disturbances are only imposing another form of false consciousness. This is precisely the problem with so-called "radical therapy," with its naive illusion that neurosis and oppression are directly connected so that, for example, a woman becoming conscious of her actual oppression as a woman would also be adequately dealing with neurotic distortions of her sexuality. The spontaneous activity of the subject generates a consciousness that is false by the standards of class consciousness. Yet it is also anchored in definite unconscious fantasies, which, though they may stem from a real childhood generated out of late capitalist contradictions, have been cut off by repression from political categories. Thus there is a false consciousness of both the objective and subjective dimensions, and it is deceptive to blend them together.

This is a dangerous question to overlook. It is not a mere intellectual failure to apply political categories to a therapeutic situation. For therapy mobilizes the neurosis in order to resolve it; but while mobilized, neurotic thinking, with its transference wishes of submission to therapeutic authority, will drag the most advanced political ideology back into domination and compulsivity.

Similarly, though mental patients are blatantly abused by society, they do not cease thereby to be troubled on their own. The labelling which defines a career for them as psychotic has a real and deleterious effect on their inner subjective life, but does not occupy the whole ground of subjectivity. To regard people as defined by their oppression flattens the humanity—and the ultimate powers of resistance—out of them, and is no better than the crude categorization that passes for a medical model.

In this regard it should be pointed out that the subjectivity of psychotic people is radically isolated; both world and self are petrified into an objectification of far greater extent than the prevailing degree of capitalist reification. Thus they are lost even to the given state of unfreedom and correspondingly objective measures, such as drugs and restraint, may at times
(although far less often than prevailing medical orthodoxy would have it) be necessary as a humane expedient. Here we may be able to appreciate the weakness of Laing's synthesis of the sixties, which fell short on both criteria. By minimizing the crippling objectification of the psychotic, Laing imposed a deep subjective therapy on them that they could ill tolerate, much less use. At the same time, as Russell Jacoby has observed, Laing tended to flatten the social dialectic by subsuming the alienation of labor into that of the subject.14

Thus a politically advanced position—one mediated through objective societal categories—is therapeutically backward; while a therapeutically advanced position—one that seeks to reclaim alienated subjective territory—is in itself politically inert. And yet, given the historical relationship between neurosis and capitalism, therapy cannot be ignored as a possible element in any overall political strategy. Our analysis tells us, however, that therapeutic practice should be bracketed from objective political goals. Concretely put, a person should be free to unburden him or herself in a therapeutic setting without regard for the objective consequences.

In a practical sense, for a therapy to flourish in the world of capitalist relations, it has to generate exchange value. This can be done in two ways (which may be combined in the real setting): the therapy can offer something that is perceived to be of genuine value because it is rare and in danger of being extinguished, like fine handicraft; or it can promise power by promoting unification with the main dynamic of capitalist expansion. With respect to the first type, we have therapy which offers the chance for deep subjective reflectivity and—or an intense, caring personal relationship. Time bought for these purposes will continue to have a premium value in a culture that works to obliterate both of them. To be sure, it is a value reserved for the privileged class. For the rest, therapeutic help will have to come either through a cut-rate compromise or via the second pathway—an already fetishized route. By being fetishized, therapy is able to help the subject defend against his deeper anxieties, thus feel less neurotic, indeed, full of “mental health.”

In today's world the therapist has become a technologist of behavior and value. Everything there is to know about sex is known. The dialectic of ineffability is abolished by behavioral technology. Masters and Johnson, fresh from their conquest of the orgasm, dance on Reich's grave as the reigning experts on the ways of Eros. Spread out around them are a host of behavioral and cognitive therapists dedicated to the Skinnerian dogma that behavior is determined by its consequences—i.e., purely objectively, undialectically, positivistically, and instrumentally. Systems analysts abound with a somewhat more subtle but equally instrumental vision of people caught hopelessly in a net of communication. And of course the tide of drug treatment continues unabated. Indeed the ultimate is already with us: therapy by computer—and

anybody who doubts that subjects have been found who like getting treated by a machine is out of touch with the pace of reification.

Similarly, commodifiable desire—the same that sells deodorants—has been amply mobilized in the interests of therapy. Here a glimmer of the hope set going by capital's democratization—that everyone is entitled to happiness—has become fused with the equation, happiness equals stimulation, into a powerful instrument upon which the neurotically troubled and alienated can seize. The basic thesis of this dimension of therapy is that the neurotic impulse should not be tinged with the hatefulfulness which is in fact its distinguishing feature. In order to promote this illusion, repression of the hateful side of impulse—the side which wants to possess, devour, castrate and so forth—is necessary; and this is secured by magnifying the image of the non-hateful side—that which just wants to enjoy—out of proportion. Here consumer culture stands at the ready with its cornucopia to back up therapeutic ideology. The Human Potential Movement, with its Joy Therapy and maximization of encountering, spontaneity and impulse, bears witness to the fetishization of this dimension. In place of an authentic desire which might emerge through overcoming the historically induced split, Human Potential, or Post-Freudian psychology dredges up an internalized Manifest Destiny: nothing should be too much for these Americans who compulsively gobble up experience as though it were choice mineral rights. Instead of genuine freedom, then, which would mean an honest confrontation of hatred, evil and madness, fetishized therapy offers us a Disneyland of the mind. And it should be noted that the therapy of an unreflective spontaneity bears more than a haphazard resemblance to the politics of spontaneity. The infantilism that afflicted Left politics of the 1960s—the "gimme-now" variety—becomes swiftly retooled into the therapist of instant breakthrough (viz. Jerry Rubin).

All of the strands of bourgeois reification get rewoven in fetishized therapy. Its mystification returns through the adoration of the latest guru or in the cultivation of "pure" consciousness through meditation. Its idealistic naivete crops up cloaked in the preachings of a Carl Rogers or an Erik Erikson.15 And its latent puritanical authoritarianism marches again dressed up, coyly enough, as the Reality (sic) Therapy of William Glasser. In sum, any ideological stance which preserves the split in bourgeois culture can be used to promote unification between the neurotically split subject and the alienated world. Thus it can be inserted into the neurotic disequilibrium where it will serve repression and reconvert a clinical into a normal neurosis.

Given the increasing alienation of bourgeois culture and its steady commodification of the subjective world, even this tenuous balance is hard to sustain; and the half-life of therapies now comes to resemble that of schools of art or rock groups. With progress in alienation, therapies have had to shout louder and promise more to get a rise out of their increasingly jaded subjects.

As a result of these trends—which match on the cultural scale the development in the individual of forms of neurosis which lack clear lines of internal repression and hence lack classical symptoms—there has come to be a gradual coalescence of therapy with other forms of mass culture. Consider the case of Transactional Analysis, one of the most successful of the new therapies, and the first to be clearly modelled on the soap opera or situation comedy, with its apparatus of games, scripts and so on. TA is unabashed about its congruity with consumerist culture—neurotic patterns, for example, are said to earn “trading stamps.” This not only helps to account for its success as a therapy but also for its lead in the assimilation of the categories of therapy to those of social control on other levels—namely, its widespread use, along with other group therapies, in corporations, the military and other arms of the bureaucracy as an instrument to help people get along with each other and the order of things. Thus, work, therapy and everyday life each become suffused with the ethos of “human relations”—the model of a “social individual” suitable as a means of production and consumption and disinclined to resist the order of capital.

It should be emphasized that in actual practice, especially as it evolves over time, no therapy fits any category of fetishization in a neat fashion. Nor, except in rare instances, can any practice be assigned wholly to the camp of domination. A brief glance at the tangled path of psychoanalysis may show why.

The main theme of the history of psychoanalysis—a history, it should be added, not yet adequately written—is that of the absorption of critique by the dominant culture. The heart of psychoanalytic therapy is restoration of integrity through the appropriation of reflective powers lost by neurotic splitting. But this is an attack at one of the points where neurosis buttresses the reification demanded by capitalist culture. Self-reflection counters the instrumentalization of reason so essential to capital. A reflective subject is a critical, resistant subject. Moreover, psychoanalysis in its critical form reveals both the existence of Eros and the actual shambles made of erotic prospects for human liberation by the bourgeois world. To be sure, it also plunges into the twisted hate which is the subjective tracing of outer domination, and so tends to discourage ready-made solutions to the human dilemma. But at its heart is a search for the truth, which necessarily serves the quest for freedom, as Marxists from Reich and Trotsky to Adorno, Marcuse and Jacoby have observed.

Consequently, in its initial phase (up to 1920), psychoanalysis was a fundamentally revolutionary doctrine, although Freud’s ambivalence towards the critical potential of what he had discovered left the way open for a number of courses. After 1920 the battle for the future of psychoanalysis began, with Marxists, Surrealists, etc., on the one side and bourgeois culture on the other. We cannot recount these struggles except to note that they took a decisive turn towards the bourgeois side when Stalinism forced anything critical out of Marxism and Nazism uprooted the psychoanalytic movement en masse and brought most of it to America. Before the emigration, the way had been
cleared for the bourgeoisification of psychoanalysis with the realization by mass culture that in the new science a weapon had been handed to them for the exploitation of their new subjective domain. Significantly enough, it was Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew and the founder of public relations, who spearheaded the appropriation of psychodynamics by advertising and the mass media in general. Meanwhile, the first among Neo-Freudians, Alfred Adler, was disseminating his consciousness-bound version of psychoanalysis among the educational and social-work establishments.

In general, in order to catch hold in American culture, a psychoanalytic idea had to be stripped of its dialectical thrust, as with the Neo-Freudian de-emphasis on the unconscious. By the same token, Orthodox Freudianism held onto the unconscious but grounded it in an unmediated id-psychology safe for bourgeois culture. In this guise psychoanalysis portrayed people as Hobbesian animals needing to be trained, an ideology compatible with historical formulations such as "capitalism exists because of anal-sadistic instincts" or "the police exist because of the masochism of the masses."

Then in the 1930s the ego-psychology of Heinz Hartmann began to hold sway. As Adorno pointed out, Hartmann's work was in a basically correct theoretical direction insofar as it restored the principle of non-identity within the subject (ego reflecting reality and id reflecting desire) and so tended to rescue psychoanalysis from the undialectical morass into which it had fallen. But the same deadly biologistic flaw inhered in Hartmann's ego, which was handed the job of "deinstinctualizing psychic energy." Given the class position of psychoanalysts and the need of World War II and post-war culture to justify the ways of the bourgeois god to man, it was an inevitable path to yet another flattening of the critical dialectic, this time the enshrinement of ego-reality over id-desire. Coordinated with this was the absorption of psychoanalysis into medical orthodoxy and psychiatric education as an avatar of truth about mental illness. The result was its transformation into an adjustment psychology that found itself trussed up in conformist thinking and upper middle class mores when the crises of the 1960s reopened the question of Marxist liberation.

Psychoanalytic practice—a term which embraces a goodly variety of pursuits—reflects the history of the doctrine. Thus psychoanalysis may be used as a mode of therapy in which the instrumental reasoning of ego psychology can be imposed as an ethos of intellectualized self-administration; or the conformism inherent in any undialectical psychology can appear as moralization, with all unconventional and protest activity being dismissed as "neurotic acting-out;" or a caricature of its original, unmediated depth-psychology can persist as rampant subjectivism, the old idealist myth that passive contemplation is praxis enough for life's problems. All of these forms

may be expected to crop up in one guise or another, simply because the therapy has been rooted in bourgeois culture as long as it has.

But just as that culture continually creates possibilities for its own overcoming, so can psychoanalytic practice touch from time to time its critical origins. Several conditions remain indispensable for this. One is the eschewing of any liberatory, radically curative or transcendent goal which is to emerge from the therapy itself—i.e., there should be no superordinate value to what is going on, no pretense that a short cut through history has been found, nor that a "true self" will emerge at the end of the treatment. Another, related condition is the bracketing out of objective and political considerations during sessions, in the interest of permitting the emergence of even the most violent and forbidden thoughts (since, as in a dream, there would then be no realistic consequences). Yet another is the recognition that, under the sway of neurotic subjectivity, political thinking will degenerate towards domination, since it is the child-mind which is mobilized by the therapeutic situation. And finally, a certain respect for the integrity and worth of the person is necessary, no matter far short of universality this may be—along, however, with the insistence that this individual be truthful concerning his or her warps and blemishes.

Therapy so construed—be it psychoanalytic or otherwise—retains the possibility of critique by refusing to present itself as more than what it is. Its very modesty is its strength. Its refusal to provide the Big Answer opens for the subject the possibility of looking outward. And by moving negatively, refusing to give answers and drawing in the limits of its judgment, a critical therapy draws a line against the colonization of the subjective world which defines late capitalism, and thereby works toward the restoration of the dialectical mode of resistance. In concrete terms, the person who emerges from therapy conducted as critique is no True Self, nor even free of normal neurosis. But he or she has widened the scope of the choices that can be made, while a certain part of locked-in subjectivity has been freed to make real demands upon the world. In sum, they are more ready for love and the politics of liberation.

Whether these choices will be actualized depends ultimately on the nature of their objects. Here the future poses a whole new conjuncture of possibilities. For if capital is moving into a new phase of scarcity, with a heightened legitimation crisis and the real possibilities of an intensified authoritarianism, then the conditions under which subjectivity both grew and became neurotic will be drastically altered. The terms of our subjectivity were forged within a capitalism undergoing more or less incessant expansion. Our child-mind is a creature of the age of surplus: commodified desire is part of consumerist society; and instrumental reason requires delay, leisure and an elaborate educational process. Clearly, all these conditions may become upset in the years to come. But if so, then the resistive powers immanent within the therapies will need all the more to be rescued and drawn into new forms of praxis for the struggles ahead.