The Mass Psychology of Misery

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home there, and one sees instead a ravening, infuriating sense of denial and loss, which nominates “narcissism” as a subversive configuration of misery. Two centuries ago Schiller spoke of the “wound” civilization has inflicted on modern humanity-division of labor. In announcing the age of “psychological man,” Philip Rieff discerned a culture “in which technics is invading and conquering the last enemy-man’s inner life, the psyche itself.” In the specialist culture of our bureaucratic-industrial age, the reliance on experts to interpret and evaluate inner life is in itself the most malignant and invasive reach of division of labor. As we have become more alien from our own experiences, which are processed, standardized, labeled, and subjected to hierarchical control, technology emerges as the power behind our misery and the main form of ideological domination. In fact, technology comes to replace ideology. The force deforming us stands increasingly revealed, while illusions are ground away by the process of immiseration.

Lasch and others may resent and try to discount the demanding nature of the contemporary “psychological” spirit, but what is contested has clearly widened for a great many, even if the outcome is equally unclear. Thus the Psychological Society may be failing to deflect or even defer conflict by means of its favorite question, “Can one change?” The real question is whether the world-that-enforces-our-inability-to-change can be forced to change, and beyond recognition.

as Lasch expresses his fear of “narcissistic resentment and insubordination” in a parallel defense of oppressive existence. The angry longing for autonomy and self-worth brings to mind another clash of values that relates to value itself. In each of us lives a narcissist who wants to be loved for himself or herself and not for his or her abilities, or even qualities. Value per se, intrinsic-a dangerously anti-instrumental, anti-capital orientation. To a Freudian therapist like Arnold Rothstein, this “expectation that the world should gratify him just because he wishes it” is repugnant. He prescribes lengthy psychoanalysis which will ultimately permit an acceptance of “the relative passivity, helplessness, and vulnerability implicit in the human condition.”

Others have seen in narcissism the hunger for a qualitatively different world. Norman O. Brown referred to its project of “loving union with the world,” while the feminist Stephanie Engel has argued that “the call back to the memory of original narcissistic bliss pushes us toward a dream of the future.” Marcuse saw narcissism as an essential element of utopian thought, a mythic structure celebrating and yearning for completeness.

The Psychological Society offers, of course, every variety of commodity, from clothes and cars to books and therapies. for every life-style, in a vain effort to assuage the prevailing appetite for authenticity. Debord was right in his counsel that the more we capitulate to a recognition of self in the dominant images of need, the less we understand our own existence and desires. The images society provides do not permit us to find ourselves at

Quite a while ago, just before the upheavals of the ’60s-shifts that have not ceased, but have been forced in less direct, less public directions — Marcuse in his One-Dimensional Man, described a populace characterized by flattened personality, satisfied and content. With the pervasive anguish of today, who could be so described? Therein lies a deep, if inchoate critique.

Much theorizing has announced the erosion of individuality’s last remnants; but if this were so, if society now consists of the thoroughly homogenized and domesticated, how can there remain the enduring tension which must account for such levels of pain and loss? More and more people I have known have cracked up. It’s going on to a staggering degree, in a context of generalized, severe emotional disease-ease.

Marx predicted, erroneously, that a deepening material immiseration would lead to revolt and to capital’s downfall. Might it not be that an increasing psychic suffering is itself leading to the reopening of revolt — indeed, that this may even be the last hope of resistance?

And yet it is obvious that “mere” suffering is no guarantee of anything. “Desire does not ‘want’ revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right,” as Deleuze and Guattari pointed out, while further on in Anti-Oedipus, remembering fascism, noting that people have desired against their own interests, and that tolerance of humiliation and enslavement remains widespread.

We know that behind psychic repression and avoidance stands social repression, even as massive denial shows at least some signs of giving way to a necessary confrontation with reality in all of its dimensions. Awareness of the social must not mean

ignoring the personal, for that would only repeat, in its own terms, the main error of psychology. If in the nightmare of today each of us has his or her fears and limitations, there is no liberating route that forgets the primacy of the whole, including how that whole exists in each of us.

Stress, loneliness, depression, boredom-the madness of everyday life. Ever-greater levels of sadness, implying a recognition, on the visceral level at least, that things could be different. How much joy is there left in the technological society, this field of alienation and anxiety? Mental health epidemiologists suspect that no more than twenty percent of us are free of psychopathological symptoms. Thus we act out a "pathology of normalcy" marked by the chronic psychic impoverishment of a qualitatively unhealthy society.

Arthur Barsky's Worried Sick (1988) diagnoses an American condition where, despite all the medical "advances," the population has never felt such a "constant need for medical care." The crisis of the family and of personal life in general sees to it that the pursuit of health, and emotional health in particular, has reached truly industrial proportions. A work-life increasingly toxic, in every sense of the word, joins with the disintegration of the family to fuel the soaring growth of the corporate industrial health machine. But for a public in its misery dramatically more interested in health care than ever before, the dominant model of medical care is clearly only part of the problem, not its solution. Thus Thomas Bittker writes of "The Industrialization of American Psychiatry" (American Journal of Psychiatry, February 1985) and Gina Kolata discusses how much distrust of doctors exists, as

which embraces the existing repressive order as the only available morality. Similar to his sour rejection of the "impulse-ridden" narcissistic personality is Neil Postman's Amusing Ourselves to Death (1985). Postman moralizes about the decline of political discourse, no longer "serious" but "shriveled and absurd," a condition caused by the widespread attitude that "amusement and pleasure" take precedence over "serious public involvement." Sennett and Bookchin can be mentioned as two other erstwhile radicals who see the narcissistic withdrawal from the present political framework as anything but positive or subversive. But even an orthodox Freudian like Russell Jacoby (Telos, Summer 1980) recognized that in the corrosion of sacrifice, "narcissism harbors a protest in the name of individual health and happiness," and Gilles Lipovetsky considered narcissism in France to have been born during the May, '68 uprisings.

Thus narcissism is more than just the location of desire in the self, or the equally ubiquitous necessity to maintain feelings of self-identity and self-esteem. There are more and more "narcissistically troubled" people, products of the lovelessness and extreme alienation of modern divided society, and its cultural and spiritual impoverishment. Deep feelings of emptiness characterize the narcissist, coupled with a boundless rage, often just under the surface, at the sense of dependency felt because of dominated life, and the hollowness of one starved by a deficient reality.

Freudian theory attributes the common trait of defiance to an immature "clinging to anal eroticism," while ignoring Society just

are the epitome of what is happening to all of us, and represent the "underlying character structure" of our age Narcissus, the image of self-love and a growing demand for fulfillment, has replaced Oedipus, with its components of guilt and repression, as the myth of our time-a shift proclaimed and adopted far beyond the Freudian community.

In passing, it is noteworthy that this change, underway since the '60s, seems to connect more with the Human Potential search for self-development than with New Age whose devotees take their desires less seriously. Common New Age nostrums, e.g. "You are infinitely creative," "You have unlimited potential," smack of a vague wish-fulfillment sanitized against anger, by those who doubt their own capacities for change and growth. Though the concept of narcissism is somewhat elusive, clinically and socially, it is often expressed in a demanding, aggressive way that frightens various partisans of traditional authority. The Human Potential preoccupation with "getting in touch with one's feelings," it must be added, was not nearly as strongly self affirming as narcissism is, where feelings — chiefly anger — are more powerful than those that need to be searched for.

Lasch's Culture of Narcissism remains extremely influential as a social analysis of the transition from Oedipus to Narcissus, given great currency and publicity by those who lament this turning away from internalized sacrifice and respect for authority. The "new leftist" Lasch proved himself a strict Freudian, and an overtly conservative one at that, looking back nostalgically at the days of the authoritarian conscience based on strong parental and social discipline. There is no trace of refusal in Lasch's work, medicine is seen as just another business (New York Times, February 20, 1990).

The mental disorder of going along with things as they are is now treated almost entirely by biochemicals, to reduce the individual's consciousness of socially induced anguish. Tranquilizers are now the world's most widely prescribed drugs, and anti-depressants set record sales as well. Temporary relief-despite side-effects and addictive properties-is easily obtained, while we are all ground down a little more. The burden of simply getting by is "Why All Those People Feel They Never Have Any Time," according to Trish Hall (New York Times, January 2, 1988), who concluded that "everybody just seems to feel worn out" by it all.

An October '89 Gallup poll found that stress-related illness is becoming the leading hazard in the nation's workplaces, and a month later an almost five-fold increase in California stress-related disability claims was reported to have occurred between 1982 and 1986. More recent figures estimate that almost two-thirds of new cases in employee assistance programs represent psychiatric or stress symptoms. In his Modern Madness (1986), Douglas La Bier asked, "What is it about work today that can cause such harm?"

Part of the answer is found in a growing literature that reveals the Information Age "office of tomorrow" to be no better than the sweatshop of yesteryear. In fact, computerization introduces a neo-Taylorist monitoring of work that surpasses all earlier management control techniques. The "technological whip" now increasingly held over white-collar workers prompted Curt Supplee, in a January '90 Washington Post article, to judge, "We

have seen the future, and it hurts." A few months earlier Sue Miller wrote in the Baltimore Evening Sun of another part of the job burnout picture, referring to a national clinical psychology study that determined that no less than a staggering 93 percent of American women "are caught up in a blues epidemic."

Meanwhile, the suicide and homicide rates are rising in the U.S. and eighty percent of the populace admit to having at least thought of suicide. Teenage suicide has risen enormously in the past three decades, and the number of teens locked up in mental wards has soared since 1970. So very many ways to gauge the pain: serious obesity among children has increased more than fifty percent in the last fifteen to twenty years; severe eating disorders (bulimia and anorexia) among college women are now relatively common; sexual dysfunction is widespread; the incidence of panic and anxiety attacks is rising to the point of possibly overtaking depression as our most general psychological malady; isolation and a sense of meaninglessness continue to make even absurd cults and IV evangelism seem attractive to many.

The litany of cultural symptomatics is virtually endless. Despite its generally escapist function, even much of contemporary film reflects the malaise; see Robert Phillip Kolker's A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese. Spielberg, Altman, for example. And many recent novels are even more unflinching in their depiction of the desolation — and degradation of society, and the burnout of youth in particular, e.g. Bret Easton Ellis' Less Than Zero, Fred Pfail's Goodman 2020, and The Knockout Artist by Harry Crews, to mention just a few.

turning away from reality by people who are overloaded by feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, a more definitive turning away than that of the prevailing psychologistic evasion. Religion invents a realm of non-alienation to compensate for the actual one; New Age philosophy announces a coming new era of harmony and peace, obviously inverting the present, unacceptable state. An undemanding, eclectic, materialistic substitute religion where any balm, any occult nonsense-channeling, crystal healing, reincarnation, rescue by UFOs, etc.-goes. "It's true if you believe it."

Anything goes, so long as it goes along with what authority has ordained: anger is "unhealthy," "negativity" a condition to be avoided at all costs. Feminism and ecology are supposedly "roots" of the New Age scene, but likewise were militant workers a "root" of the Nazi movement (National Socialist German Workers Party, remember). Which brings to mind the chief New Age influence, Carl Jung. It is unknown or irrelevant to "non judgmental" bliss-seekers that in his attempt to resurrect all the old faiths and myths, Jung was less a psychologist than a figure of theology and reaction Further, as president of the International Society for Psychotherapy from 1933 to 1939, he presided over its Nazified German section and co-edited the Zentralblattfur Psychotherapie (with M.H. Goring, cousin of the Reichsmarshall of the same name).

Still gathering steam, apparently, since the appearance of Otto Kernberg's Borderline Conditions and pathological Narcissism (1975) and The Culture of Narcissism by Christopher Lasch (1978), is the idea that "narcissistic personality disorders"

The Human Potential Movement did at least raise publicly and widely the notion of an end to disease, however much it failed to make good on that claim. As more and more of everyday life has come under medical dominion and supervision, the almost bewildering array of new therapies was part of an undercutting of the older, mainly Freudian, "scientific" model for behavior. In the shift of therapeutic expectations, a radical hope appeared, which went beyond merely positive-thinking or empty confessionalist aspects and is different from quiescence.

A current form of self-help which clearly represents a step forward from both traditional therapy, commodified and under the direction of expertise, and the mass-marketed seminar-introduction sort of training is the very popular "support group." Non-commercial and based on peer-group equality. support groups for many types of emotional distress have quadrupled in number in the past ten years. Where these groups do not enforce the 12-step ideology of "anonymous" groups (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous) based on the individual's subjection to a "Higher Power" (read: all constituted authority and most of them do not-they provide a great source of solidarity, and work against the depoliticizing force of illness or distress experienced in an isolated state.

If the Human Potential Movement thought it possible to re-create personality and thus transform life, New Ageism goes it one better with its central slogan, "Create your own reality." Considering the advancing, invasive desolation, an alternative reality seems desirable-the eternal consolation of religion. For the New Age, booming since the mid-1980s, is essentially a religious

In this context of immiseration, what is happening to prevailing values and mores is of signal interest in further situating our "mass psychology" and its significance. There are plenty of signs that the demand for "instant gratification" is more and more insistent, bringing with it outraged lamentations from both left and right and a further corrosion of the structure of repression.

Credit card fraud, chiefly the deliberate running up of bills, reached the billion-and-a-half-dollar level in 1988 as the personal bankruptcy solution to debt, which doubled between 1980 and 1990. Defaults on federal student loans more than quadrupled from 1983 to 1989.

In November '89, in a totally unprecedented action, the U.S. Navy was forced to suspend operations world-wide for 48 hours owing to a rash of accidents involving deaths and injuries over the preceding three weeks. A total safety review was involved in the moratorium, which renewed discussion of drug abuse, absenteeism, unqualified personnel, and other problems threatening the Navy's very capacity to function.

Meanwhile, levels of employee theft reach ever higher levels. In 1989 the Dallas Police Department reported a 29 percent increase in retail shrinkage over the previous five years, and a national survey conducted by London House said 62 percent of fast-food employees admitted stealing from employers. In early 1990 the FBI disclosed that shoplifting was up 35 percent since 1984, cutting heavily into retail profits.

November 1988 broke a forty-year mark for low voter turnout, continuing a downward direction in electoral participation that has plagued presidential elections since 1960. Average college

entrance exam (SAT) scores declined throughout the ’70s and early ’80s, then rebounded very slightly, and in 1988 continued to fall. At the beginning of the ’80s Arthur Levin’s portrait of college students, When Dreams and Heroes Died, recounted “a generalized cynicism and lack of trust,” while at the end of the decade Robert Nisbet’s The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in North America decried the disastrous effects that the younger generation’s attitude of “hanging loose” was having on the system. George F. Will, for his part, reminded us all that social arrangements, including the authority of the government, rest “on a willingness of the public to believe in them,” and Harvard economist Harvey Liebenstein’s Inside the Firm echoed him in stressing that companies must depend on the kind of work their employees want to do.

The nation’s high schools now graduate barely seventy percent of students who enter as freshman, despite massive focus on the dropout rate problem. As Michael de Courcy Hinds put it (New York Times, February 17, 1990), “U.S. educators are trying almost anything to keep children in school,” while an even more fundamental phenomenon is the rising number of people of all ages unwilling to learn to read and write. David Harman (Illiteracy: A National Dilemma, 1987) gave voice to how baffling the situation is, asking why has the acquisition of such skills, “seemingly so simple, been so evasive?”

The answer may be that illiteracy, like schooling, is increasingly seen to be valued merely for its contribution to the workplace. The refusal of literacy is but another sign of a deep turn-off from the system, part of the spreading disaffection. In mid-1988 a

anticipation, and suggestion; brainwashing and the shamanic vision quest both use it.

Werner Erhard’s EST, speaking of intensive psychological manipulation was one of the most popular and, in some ways, most characteristic Human Potential phenomena. Its founder became very wealthy by helping Erhard Seminars Training adepts “choose to become what they are.” In a classic case of blaming the victim, EST brought large numbers to a near-religious embrace of one of the system’s basic lies: its graduates are obediently conformist because they “accept responsibility” for having created things as they are. Transcendental Meditation actually marketed itself in terms of the passive incorporation into society it helped its students achieve. TM’s alleged usefulness for adjustment to the varied “excesses and stresses” of modern society was a major selling point to corporations, for example.

Trapped in a highly rationalized and technological world, Human Potential seekers naturally wanted personal development, emotional immediacy, and above all, a sense of having some control over their lives. Self-help best-sellers of the ’70s, including Power, Your Erroneous Zones, How to Take Charge of Your Life, Self-Creation, Looking Out for #1, and Pulling Your Own Strings, focus on the issue of control. Preaching the gospel of reality as a personal construct, however, meant that control had to be narrowly defined. Once again acceptance of social reality as a given meant, for example, that “sensitivity training” would likely mean continued insensitivity to most of reality, an openness to more of the same alienation-more ignorance, more suffering.

Conceived out of critical responses to Freudian psychoanalysis, which has shifted its sights toward ever-earlier phases of development in childhood and infancy, the Human Potential Movement began in the mid-60s and acquired its characteristic features by the early ’70s. With a post-Freudian emphasis on the conscious ego and its actualization, Human Potential set forth a smorgasbord of therapies, including varieties or amalgams of personal growth seminars, body awareness techniques, and Eastern spiritual disciplines. Almost buried in the welter of partial solutions lies a subversive potential: the notion that, as Adelaide Bry put it, life “can be a time of infinite and joyous possibility.” The demand for instant relief from psychic immiseration underlined an increasing concern for the dignity and fulfillment of individuals, and Daniel Yankelovich (New Rules, 1981) saw the cultural centrality of this quest, concluding that by the end of the ’70s, some eighty percent of Americans had become interested in this therapeutic search for transformation.

But the privatized approaches of the Human Potential Movement, high-water mark of contemporary Psychological Society, were obviously unable to deliver on their promises to provide any lasting, non-illusory breakthroughs. Arthur Janov recognized that “everyone in this society is in a lot of pain,” but expressed no awareness at all of the repressive society generating it. His Primal Scream technique qualifies as the most ludicrous cure-all of the ’70s. Scientology’s promise of empowerment consisted mainly of bioelectronic feedback technologies aimed at socializing people to an authoritarian enterprise and world view. The popularity of cult groups like the Moonies reminds one of a time-tested process for the uninitiated: isolation, deprivation,

Hooper survey indicated that work now ranks eighth out of ten on a scale of important satisfactions in life, and 1989 showed the lowest annual productivity growth since the 1981–83 recession. The drug “epidemic,” which cost the government almost $25 billion to combat in the ’80s, threatens society most acutely at the level of the refusal of work and sacrifice. There is no “war on drugs” that can touch the situation while at the same time defending this landscape of pain and false values. The need for escape grows stronger and the sick social order feels consequent desertion, the steady corrosion of all that holds it up.

Unfortunately, the biggest “escape” of all is one that serves, in the main, to preserve the distorted present: what Sennett has called “the increasing importance of psychology in bourgeois life.” This includes the extraordinary proliferation of new kinds of therapy since the ’60s, and behind this phenomenon the rise of psychology as the predominant religion. In the Psychological Society the individual sees himself as a problem. This ideology constitutes a pre-eminent social imprisonment, because it denies the social; psychology refuses to consider that society as a whole shares fundamental responsibility for the conditions produced in every human being.

The ramifications of this ideology can be seen on all sides. For instance, the advice to those besieged by work stress to “take a deep breath, laugh, walk it off,” etc. Or the moralizing exhortations to recycle, as if a personal ethics of consumption is a real answer to the global eco-crisis caused by industrial production. Or the 1990 California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem as a solution to the major social breakdown in that state.

At the very center of contemporary life, this outlook legitimates alienation, loneliness, despair, and anxiety. because it cannot see the context for our malaise. It privatizes distress, and suggests that only non-social responses are attainable. This “bottomless fraud of mere inwardness,” in Adorno’s words, pervades every aspect of American life, mystifying experience and thus perpetuating oppression.

The widespread allegiance to a therapeutic world view constitutes a culture tyrannized by the therapeutic in which, in the name of mental health, we are getting mental disease. With the expanding influence of behavioral experts, powerlessness and estrangement expand as well; modern life must be interpreted for us by the new expertise and its popularizers.

Gail Sheehy’s Passages (1977), for example, considers life developments without reference to any social or historical context, thereby vitiating her concern for the “free and autonomous self.” Arlie Russell Hochschild’s Managed Heart (1983) focuses on the “commercialization of human feelings” in an increasingly service-sector economy, and manages to avoid any questioning of the totality by remaining ignorant of the fact of class society and the unhappiness it produces. When Society Becomes an Addict (1987) is Anne Wilson Schaef’s completely incoherent attempt to deny, despite the title, the existence of society, by dealing strictly with the interpersonal. And these books are among the least escapist of the avalanche of “how-to” therapy books inundating the bookstores and supermarkets.

his finding: “Persons given intensive and prolonged psychotherapy are no better off than those in matched control groups given no treatment over the same time interval.” On the other hand, there is no doubt that therapy or counseling does make many people feel better, regardless of specific results. This anomaly must be due to the fact that consumers of therapy believe they have been cared for, comforted, listened to. In a society growing ever Colder, this is no small thing. It is also true that the Psychological Society conditions its subjects into blaming themselves and that those who most feel they need therapy tend to be those most easily exploited: the loneliest, most insecure nervous, depressed, etc. It is easy to state the old dictum, “Natura sanat, medicus curat” (Nature heals, doctors/counselors/therapists treat); but where is the natural in the hyper-estranged world of pain and isolation we find ourselves in? And yet there is no getting around the imperative to remake the world. If therapy is to heal, make whole, what other possibility is there but to transform this world, which would of course also constitute a de-therapizing of society. It is clearly in this spirit that the Situationist International declared in 1963, “Sooner or later the S.I. must define itself as a therapeutic.”

Unfortunately, the great communal causes later in the decade acquired a specifically therapeutic cast mainly in their degeneration, in the splintering of the ’60’s thrust into smaller, more idiosyncratic efforts. “The personal is the political” gave way to the merely personal, as defeat and disillusion overtook naive activism.

time limits enclosing a space divorced from everyday reality. Similarly, the purely contractual nature of the therapeutic connection in itself guarantees that all therapy inevitably reproduces alienated society. To deal with alienation via a relationship paid for b the hour is to overlook the congruence of therapist and prostitute as regards the traits just enumerated.

Gramsci defined “intellectual” as the “functionary in charge of consent,” a formulation which also fits the role of therapist. By leading others to concentrate their ‘desiring energy outside the social territory,” as Guattari put it, he thereby manipulates them into accepting the constraints of society. By failing to challenge the social categories within which clients have organized their experiences, the therapist strengthens the hold of those categories. He tries, typically, to focus clients away from stories about work and into the so-called “real” areas-personal life and childhood.

Psychological health, as a function of therapy, is largely an educational procedure. The project is that of a shared system: the client is led to acceptance of the therapist’s basic assumptions and metaphysics. Francois Roustang, in Psychoanalysis Never Lets Go (1983), wondered why a therapeutic method whose “explicit aim is the liberation of forces with a view toward being capable ‘of enjoyment and efficiency’ (Freud) so often ends in alienation either…because the treatment turns out to be interminable, or…(the client) adopts the manner of speech and thought, the theses as well as the prejudices of psychoanalysis.”

Ever since Hans Lysenko’s short but famous article of 1952, “The Effects of Psychotherapy,” countless other studies have validated

It is clear that psychology is part of the absence of community or solidarity, and of the accelerating social disintegration. The emphasis is on changing one’s personality, and avoiding at all costs the facts of bureaucratic consumer capitalism and its meaning to our lives and consciousness. Consider Samuel Klarreich’s Stress Solution (1988): “…I believe that we can largely determine what will be stressful. and how much it will interfere with our lives, by the views we uphold irrespective of what goes on in the workplace.” Under the sign of productivity, the citizen is now trained as a lifelong inmate of an industrial world, a condition, as Ivan Illich noted, not unrelated to the fact that everyone tends toward the condition of therapy’s patient, or at least tends to accept its world-view.

In the Psychological Society, social conflicts of all kinds are automatically shifted to the level of psychic problems, in order that they can be charged to individuals as private matters. Schooling produces near-universal resistance, which is classified, for example, as “hyperkinesis” and dealt with by drugs and/or psychiatric ideology. Rather than recognize the child’s protest, his or her life is invaded still further, to ensure that no one eludes the therapeutic net.

It is clear that a retreat from the social, based largely on the experience of defeat and consequent resignation, promotes the personal as the only possible terrain of authenticity. A desperate denizen of the “singles world” is quoted by Louise Banikow: “My ambition is wholly personal now. All I want to do is fall in love.” But the demand for fulfilment, however circumscribed by psychology, is that of a ravening hunger and a level of suffering

that threaten to burst the bonds of the prescribed inner world. As noted above, indifference to authority, distrust of institutions, and a spreading nihilism mean that the therapeutic can neither satisfy the individual nor ultimately safeguard the social order. Toynbee noted that a decadent culture furthers the rise of a new church that extends hope to the proletariat while servicing only the needs of the ruling class. Perhaps sooner than later People will begin to realize that psychology is this Church, which may be the reason why so many voices of therapy now Counsel their flocks against “unrealistic expectations” of what life could be.

For over half a century the regulative, hierarchical needs of a bureaucratic-consumerist system have sought modern means of control and prediction. The same consolatory ideology of the psychological outlook, in which the self is the over-arching form of reality, has served these control needs and owes most of its assumptions to Sigmund Freud.

For Freud and his Wagnerian theory of warring instincts and the arbitrary division of the self into id, ego and superego, the passions of the individual were primordial and dangerous. The work of civilization was to check and harness them. The whole edifice of psychoanalysis, Freud said, is based upon the theory of necessary repression; domination is obviously assisted by this view. That human culture is established only by means of suffering, that constant renunciation of desire is inevitable for continuance of civilization, that work is sustained by the energy of stifled love-all this is required by the “natural aggressiveness” of “human nature,” the latter an eternal and universal fact, of course.

Psychopathology and the Quest for Control (1989), discuss the very rapid rise of their subject while Castel, Castel and Lovell’s earlier The Psychiatric Society (1982) could glimpse the nearing day when childhood will be totally regimented by medicine and psychology. Some facets of this trend are no longer in the realm of conjecture; James R. Schiffman, for instance, wrote of one by-product of the battered family in his “Teen-Agers End Up in Psychiatric Hospitals in Alarming Numbers” (Wall Street Journal, Feb. 3, 1989).

Therapy is a key ritual of our prevailing psychological religion and a vigorously growing one. The American Psychiatric Association’s membership jumped from 27,355 in 1983 to 36,223 by the end of the ’80s, and in 1989 a record 22 million visited psychiatrists or other therapists covered to at least some extent by health insurance plans. Considering that only a small minority of those who practice the estimated 500 varieties of psychotherapy are psychiatrists or otherwise health insurance-recognized, even these figures do not capture the magnitude of therapy’s shadow world.

Philip Rieff termed psychoanalysis “yet another method of learning how to endure the loneliness produced by culture,” which is a good enough way to introduce the artificial situation and relationship of therapy, a peculiarly distanced. circumscribed and asymmetrical affair. Most of the time, one person talks and the other listens. The client almost always talks about himself and the therapist almost never does. The therapist scrupulously eschews social contact with clients. another reminder to the latter that they have not been talking to a friend, along with the strict

since the mid-'50s, in stress-related illnesses, called attention to the immensely crippling nature of modern industrial alienation. Government funding was called for, and was provided by the 1963 federal Community Mental Health Center legislation. Armed with the relatively new tranquilizing drugs to anaesthetize the poor as well as the unemployed, a state presence was initiated in urban areas hitherto beyond the reach of the therapeutic ethos. Small wonder that some black militants saw the new mental health services as basically refined police pacification and surveillance systems for the ghettos. The concerns of the dominant order, ever anxious about the masses, are chiefly served, however, here as elsewhere, by the strength of the image of what science has shown to be normal, healthy, and productive. Authority's best friend is relentless self-inspection according to the ruling canons of repressive normalcy in the Psychological Society.

The nuclear family once provided the psychic underpinning of what Norman O. Brown called "the nightmare of infinitely expanding technological progress." Thought by some to be a bastion against the outer world, it has always served as transmission belt for the reigning ideology, more specifically as the place in which the interiorizing psychology of women is produced, the social and economic exploitation of women is legitimated and the artificial scarcity of sexuality is guarded.

Meanwhile, the state's concern with delinquent, uneducable and unsocializable children, as studied by Donzelot and others, is but one aspect of its overshadowing of the family. Behind the medicalized image of the good, the state advances and the family steadily loses its functions. Rothbaum and Weisz, in Child

Understanding fully the deforming force of all this repression, Freud considered it likely that neurosis has come to characterize all of humanity. Despite his growing fear of fascism after World War I, he nonetheless contributed to its growth by justifying the renunciation of happiness. Reich referred to Freud and Hitler with some bitterness, observing that "a few years later, a pathological genius — making the best of ignorance and fear of happiness — brought Europe to the verge of destruction with the slogan of 'heroic renunciation'."

With the Oedipus complex, inescapable source of guilt and repression, we see Freud again as the consummate Hobbesian. This universal condition is the vehicle whereby self-imposed taboos are learned via the (male) childhood' experience of fear of the father and lust for the mother. It is based on Freud's reactionary fairy tale of a primal horde dominated by a powerful father who possessed all available women and who was killed and devoured by his sons. This was ludicrous anthropology even when penned, and fully exhibits one of Freud's most basic errors, that of equating society with civilization. There is now convincing evidence that precivilized life was a time of non-dominance and equality, certainly not the bizarre patriarchy Freud provided as origin of most of our sense of guilt and shame. He remained convinced of the inescapability of the Oedipal background, and the central validity of both the Oedipal complex and of guilt itself for the interests of culture.

Freud considered psychic life as shut in on itself, uninfluenced by society. This premise leads to a deterministic view of childhood and even infancy, along with such judgements as "the fear of

becoming poor is derived from regressive anal eroticism"; consider his Psychopathology of Everyday Life, and its ten editions between 1904 and 1924 to which new examples of "slips," or unintended revelatory usages of words, were continually added. We do not find a single instance, despite the upheavals of many of those years in and near Austria, of Freud detecting a "slip" that related to fear of revolution on the part of this bourgeois subjects, or even of any day-to-day social fears, such as related to strikes, insubordination, or the like. It seems more than likely that unrepressed slips concerning such matters were simple screened Out as unimportant to his universalist, ahistorical views.

Also worth noting is Freud's "discovery" of the death instinct In his deepening pessimism, he countered Eros, the life instinct with Thanatos, a craving for death and destruction, as fundamental and ineradicable a part of the species as Striving for life. The aim of all life is death," simply put (1920). While it may be pedestrian to note that this discovery was accompanied by the mass carnage of World War I, an increasingly unhappy marriage, and the onset of cancer of the jaw, there is no mistaking the service this dystopian metaphysics performs in justifying authority. The assumption of the death instinct — that aggression, hatred, and fear will always be with us — militates against the idea that liberation is possible. In later decades, the death instinct-oriented work of Melanie Klein flourished in English ruling circles precisely because of its emphasis on social restraints in limiting aggressiveness. Today's leading neo-Freudian, Lacan, also seems to see suffering and domination as inevitable; specifically, he holds that patriarchy is a law of nature.

more and more co-operation by the ruled in order to function, are no guarantee of civic harmony. In fact, with their overall failure, class society is running out of tactics and excuses, and the new encroachments have created new pockets of resistance.

The setup now usually referred to as "community mental health" can be legitimately traced to the establishment of the Mental Hygiene Movement in 1908. In the context of the Taylorist degradation of work called Scientific Management and a challenging tide of worker militancy, the new psychological offensive was based on the dictum that "individual unrest to a large degree means bad mental hygiene." Community psychiatry represents a later, nationalized form of this industrial psychology, developed to deflect radical currents away from social transformation objectives and back under the yoke of the dominating logic of productivity. By the 1920s, the workers had become the objects of social science professionals to an even greater degree, with the work of Elton Mayo and others, at a time when the promotion of consumption as a way of life came to be seen as itself a means of easing unrest, collective and individual. And by the end of the 1930s, industrial psychology had "already developed many of the central innovations which now characterize community psychology," according to Diana Ralph's Work and Madness (1983), such as mass psychological testing, the mental health team, auxiliary non-professional counselors, family and out-patient therapy, and psychiatric counseling to businesses.

The million-plus men rejected by the armed forces during World War II for "mental unfitness" and the steady rise. observable

poor to become emotionally disabled. Roy Porter observed that because it imagines power, madness is both impotence and omnipotence, which serves as a reminder that due to the influence of alienation, powerlessness, and poverty, women are more often driven to breakdown than men. Society makes us all feel manipulated and thus mistrustful: “paranoid,” and who could not be depressed? The gap between the alleged neutrality and wisdom of the medical model and the rising levels of pain and disease is widening, the credibility of the former visibly corroding.

It has been the failure of earlier forms of social control that has given psychological medicine, with its inherently expansionist aims, its upward trajectory in the past three decades. The therapeutic model of authority (and the supposedly value-free professional power that backs it up) is increasingly intertwined with state power, and has mounted an invasion of the self much more far reaching than earlier efforts, “There are no limits to the ambition of psychoanalytic control; if it had its way, nothing would escape it,” according to Guattari.

In terms of the medicalization of deviant behavior, a great deal more is included, than, say, the psychiatric sanctions on Soviet dissidents or the rise of a battery of mind control techniques, including behavior modification, in U.S. Prisons Punishment has come to include treatment and new powers of punishment; medicine, psychology, education and social work take over more and more aspects of control and discipline while the legal machinery grows more medical, psychological, pedagogical. But the new arrangements, relying chiefly on fear and necessitating

Marcuse, Norman O. Brown and others have re-theorized Freud in a radical direction by taking his ideas as descriptive rather than prescriptive, and there is a limited plausibility to an orientation that takes his dark views as valid only with respect to alienated life, rather than to any and all imaginable social worlds. There are even many Freudian feminists; their efforts to apply psychoanalytic dogma to the oppression of women, however, appear even more contrived.

Freud did identify the “female principle” as closer to nature, less sublimated, less diffused through repression than that of the male. But true to his overall values, he located an essential advance in civilization in the victory of male intellectuality over womanly sensuality. What is saddest about the various attempts to reappropriate Freud is the absence of a critique of civilization: his entire work is predicated on the acceptance of civilization as highest value. And basic in a methodological sense, regarding those who would merely reorient the Freudian edifice, is Foucault’s warning that the will to any system “is to extend our participation in the present system.”

In the area of gender difference, Freud straightforwardly affirmed the basic inferiority of the female. His view of women as castrated men is a case of biological determinism: anatomically they are simply less, and condemned by this to masochism and penis envy.

I make no pretense to completeness or depth in this brief look at Freud, but it should be already obvious how false was his disclaimer (New Introductory Lectures, 1933) that Freudianism posits any values beyond those inherent in “objective” science.

And to this fundamental failing could be added the arbitrary nature of virtually all of his philosophy. Divorced as it pointedly is from gross social reality — further examples are legion, but seduction theory comes to mind, in which he declared that sexual abuse is, most importantly, fantasy — one Freudian inference could just as plausibly be replaced by a different one. Overall, we encounter, in the summary of Frederick Crews, "a doctrine plagued by mechanism, reification, and arbitrary universalism."

On the level of treatment, by his own accounts, Freud never was able to permanently cure a single patient, and psychoanalysis has proven no more effective since. In 1984 the National Institute of Mental Health estimated that over forty million Americans are mentally ill, while a study by Regier, Boyd et al. (Archives of General Psychiatry, November 1988) showed that fifteen percent of the adult population had a "psychiatric disorder." One obvious dimension of this worsening situation, in Joel Kovel's words, is the contemporary family, which "has fallen into a morass of permanent crisis, as indicated by the endless stream of emotionally disabled individuals it turns over to the mental health industry.

If alienation is the essence of all psychiatric conditions, Psychology is the study of the alienated, but lacks the awareness that this is so. The effect of the total society, in which the individual can no longer recognize himself or herself, by the canons of Freud and the Psychological Society, is seen as irrelevant to diagnosis and treatment. Thus psychiatry appropriates disabling pain and frustration, redefines them as illnesses and, in some cases, is able to suppress the symptoms. Meanwhile, a morbid world continues its estranging technological rationality that excludes any continuously spontaneous, affective life: the person is subjected to a discipline designed, at the expense of the sensuous, to make him or her an instrument of production.

Mental illness is primarily an unconscious escape from this design, a form of passive resistance. R.D. Laing spoke of schizophrenia as a psychic numbing which feigns a kind of death to preserve something of one's inner aliveness. The representative schizophrenic is around 20, at the point of culmination of the long period of socialization which has prepared him to take up his role in the workplace. He is not "adequate" to this destiny. Historically, it is noteworthy that schizophrenia is very closely related to industrialism, as Torrey shows convincingly in his Schizophrenia and Civilization (1980).

In recent years Szasz, Foucault, Goffman, and others have called attention to the ideological preconceptions through which "mental illness" is seen. "Objective" language cloaks cultural biases, as in the case, for instance, of sexual "disorders": in the 19th century masturbation was treated as a disease, and it has only been within the past twenty years that the psychological establishment declassified homosexuality as illness.

And it has long been transparent that there is a class component to the origins and treatment of mental illness. Not only is what is called "eccentric" among the rich often termed psychiatric disorder-and treated quite differently among the poor, but many studies since Hollingshead and Redlich's Social Class and Mental Illness (1958) have demonstrated how much more likely are the