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Metatherapy

From Psychotherapy to meditation - *Translated from French. Published in the French review "SEXPOL", April 1979.*

"It is interesting to note that science is reaching conclusions similar to those of the great traditions." Prof. A.A. Tomatis (Vers l'ecoute humaine, tome I, p.94).

"Abused, alienated, anxious, atomized . . .
Betrayed, bewildered, bitten, broken . . .
Changed, colonized, crippled and cut up . . .
Denied, depressed, desperate, divided . . .
Excruciated, forgotten, guilty, humiliated . . .
Inhibited, jugulated, knocked down, lobotomized . . .
Maddened, nervous, overpowered, possessed, queer, raped . . .
Shocked, tortured, upset, vexed, worried, x. . .y. . .z. . . ed. . ."

This, unfortunately, is not a poem, but only some of the adjectives used by "lunatics" shut up in psychiatric hospitals, and who, far from feeling "cured" by the treatments they undergo (chemotherapy, electric shock treatment, insulin based therapy) realize that these pseudo treatments have, at best, only masked the problems without in any way having solved them. The repression of their "madness" in the depths of the psyche entails a profound degradation in which they will vegetate until they are once again locked up when they have another crisis. Our society does not seem to offer any other alternative to those who feel they are "freaking out"; it only admits madness in its hidden sadistic and repressive aspects such as: violence of the political powers, the police, the military, the psychiatrists, etc. (1) And yet, an entirely different and non repressive conception of "madness" and of some of its positive aspects for the evolution of the psyche is developing in particular in the U.S.A. This conception, which the English "anti-psychiatric" movement helped to bring into being (through the theories and experiences of R.D. Laing, D. Cooper, J. Berke, etc.) (2), considers that some mental illnesses are self-transforming processes of the psyche, which must above all be allowed to express themselves freely. The people who are living out this internal transformation should on the contrary be provided with a real "asylum" - giving the word the correct meaning - in which they would be able to go through this period of temporary crisis and of total reappraisal of the structure of their psyche with a feeling of complete security, for both themselves and

others. And the experience proves that, in some very precise cases (very often labelled by psychiatrists as maniac, maniac-depressive, schizophrenic) if the process is allowed to develop naturally without masking, stifling or repressing it through the use of tranquilizers and neuroleptics or anti-depressives, it will be over far sooner and a state of calm will be regained in a natural way. It is obvious that the person going through this ordeal which, like any period of growth, is difficult and painful, must be surrounded by attentive (but no constraining) care and must also be convinced of the positive aspects of such an internal revolution. The process, then, becomes a self confirming rather than a guilt-forming experience.

A Californian psychiatrist, Dr. John W. Perry, has created an asylum of this type. (3) In fact, this is not a new insight into insanity, but the rediscovery of an attitude which is common to a great number of civilizations other than our rational and mechanical one. Mircea Eliade, the great expert on religions, (4) has described in detail how in primitive societies, the Shaman, the Witch Doctor, the Medicine Man, undergoes during his long initiation trials and in particular "illnesses" which would rapidly entail his internment in our modern world, and which quite to the contrary, make him the most honored and useful person in his society. Indeed, it is by going through these experiences of death and rebirth that the Shaman is endowed with his paranormal faculties as soothsayer, healer and magician. The Shaman's powers have come to be accepted as real, rather than symbolic, since the studies of Carlos Casteneda, (5) ethnologist of the Los Angeles University of California, and those of other scientists such as Professor Lawrence LeShan, head of the psychology Department of the Applied Biology Institute of New York's Trafalgar Hospital. (6)

A well known psychologist with a university background, Professor LeShan first became interested in healers while carrying out research to prove the unreliability of techniques such as laying of hands, remote healing, etc. Not only did he radically change his views in the course of his research, but after becoming a healer himself, he started to train others by developing the faculties that are potentially present in every person. Professor LeShan's main contribution to the elaboration of a new conception of the psyche that does not consider any state of mind to be abnormal is his comparative study of the vision of Reality by mediums and clairvoyants on one hand, well known mystics on the other, and also by atomic physicists. Many other similar research works may be quoted, such as Dr. Stanislas Grof's, at the Baltimore Psychiatric Centre, or Stanley Kripner's, etc. Such research works help to lay out in terms that are acceptable to modern science, a theory that explains for one thing the "magical" and "initiation" experience found in civilizations that have remained close to nature and which have not allowed their extra-sensorial perception faculties to waste away. In these civilizations, man still knows that the universe is "one" and lives as an unseparate part of this "whole". He also knows that the world that can be perceived by the senses is but a semblance of the truth and not the ultimate reality. In fact, this theory is the psychological and psycho-physiological aspect of the relativity physics theory developed by A. Einstein, Heisenberg, Minkowski, Oppenheimer, Edington, Schrodinger, etc.

In his book, "The Universe and Dr. Einstein," Lincoln Barner describes the history of scientific research as: "The long progression of science toward the unification of human conceptions concerning the physical world. Throughout the centuries, the various currents of discovery, theory, research, and reasoning have resolutely converged and mixed, flowing toward even broader and deeper channels. The first great step (toward this unitarian view) was to reduce the multiple worldly substances to some 90 natural elements, which were in turn reduced to a small number of elementary particles. At the same time, the different "**forces**" acting in the universe were successively found to be varied manifestations of the same electro-magnetic force, and all the existing radiations - light, heat, x-rays, radio waves, gamma rays - to be but electro-magnetic waves having different wave-lengths and frequencies. The features of the universe were thus finally reduced to a small number of quantitative parameters - space, time, substance, energy and gravity.

But Einstein, in his Relativity Theory, proved that substance and energy are equivalent and, in the Generalized Relativity Theory, he showed the indivisibility of the space-time continuum. His Unified Field Theory aimed at the high point of this unifying process, since in its majestic perspective the entire universe appears to be an elementary field in which each star, each atom, each wandering comet, each galaxy as well as every electron, is but a ripple or a swelling on the underlying space-time unity. A deep simplicity would thus replace the apparent complexity of nature. Distinctions between gravity and electro-magnetic forces, substances and energy, electric charge and field, all disappear when their mutual relationships are discovered, and give place to the four-dimensional continuum configurations in the universe revealed by Einstein. All the world perceptions and all the abstract intuitions of reality would thereby ultimately converge toward a unitarian view disclosing the deep underlying unity of the universe."

This short incursion into quantum physics was necessary to understand why nowadays every movement violently opposed to repressive psychiatry (and in particular to the generalized usage of tranquilizers and neuroleptics, is based upon notions familiar to traditional civilizations, namely: **energy, free energy flow, energy block, energy release, energy transmutation.**

This search for a unitarian conception of the Psyche is the nucleus of all the new "Growth Movement" techniques that have developed in the U.S.A. under the name of "Humanistic Psychology" or "Human Potential Movement"; the best known techniques of this movement are bio-energetics, Gestalt Therapy, the Feldenkreis method, Rolfing, Primal Therapies, etc. In this article, we are mainly concerned with Transpersonal Psychology, stemming concurrently from the works of the well known psychoanalyst C.G. Jung, the Psychosynthesis of Prof. Assagioli (an early critic of some aspects of the Freudian psychoanalysis) and, above all, from the work of Aldous Huxley (The Eternal Philosophy -Gates of Perception) and Allan Watts (namely:

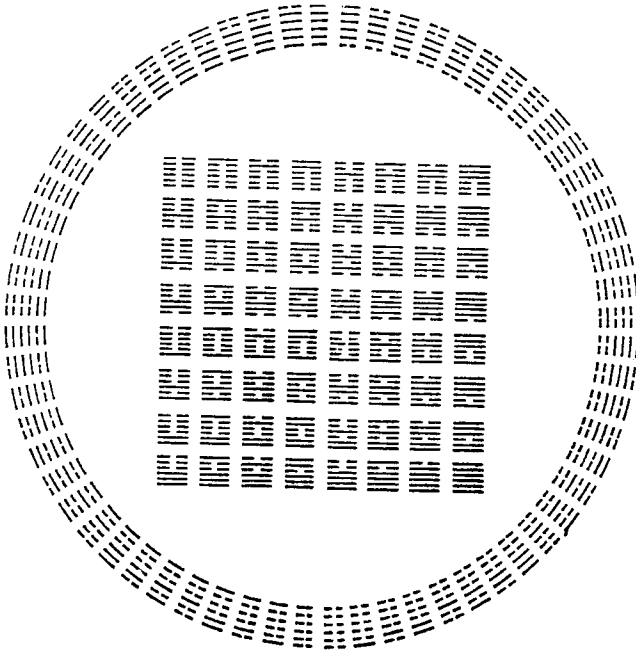
Psychotherapy East and West, Fayard ed.). This trend, ahead of its time in the psychological and psychotherapeutic research fields, incorporates the contributions of parapsychology, thereby rejoining scientifically the intuitive, experienced certitudes of Shamans and Medicine Men, healers, alchemists, acupuncture pioneers. It culminates with the recognition of certain forms of meditation as a highly significant therapeutic resource.

In fact, meditation is not at all a mental reflection on a more or less deep subject, as is often assumed in the West. On the contrary, real meditation goes beyond the verbal field by leading one to become directly conscious of one's own energy field and its movements, transformations, and transmutations. The development and harmonious growth of this **energetic body**, and not only of the physical body, is the main principle of personal development. The research of the "Human Potential Movement", therefore, partly rejoins the Traditional Paths: Yogas, Sufism, Theravada Buddhism, The Jewish Kabala, etc. But there is an essential difference: the traditional methods have been tested and perfected over thousands of years, and their teachers are generally tested for many years before being authorized to transmit what they have received. We ourselves should be much more discriminating in the selection of a "Growth Movement" group leader, since some claim to be "group leaders" after only a few weeks' experience.

In deep meditation, the calm, the state of spiritual peace one may reach through an incredible sharpening of subtle attention, allow us to become clearly conscious of what we really are; that is, a set of electromagnetic currents, an endless dance of sub-atomic particles within a void which cannot be measured on the scale of these particles. This is precisely the vision of the vacuity described by Prince Sidartha Gautama, called the **Buddha**, meaning the **awakened one**, once he discovered the fundamental notion of **universal impermanence** in his great **enlightenment**.

Nowadays, physics rejoins what was until then taken to be metaphysical and approximately represented by symbols such as the Chinese Taoist symbol of the "Pi" or "Sky", which the central void, the "non-manifested" is the "origin" (beyond space-time) of the "manifested" world. The non-manifested gives birth to the unity which in turn breeds duality, the origin of multiplicity. The reverse path leads back to the non-manifested. Such a cyclic conception of the transformations of the universal energy is particularly well expressed by the cosmic system of the Chinese I-Ching. The non-manifested, undifferentiated energy reveals itself first through unity, a full line in the I-Ching, then through duality . The full line stands for "Yang", i.e. the active, centrifugal, etc. principle; the broken line is "Yin", i.e. the receptive, centripetal, etc., principle. The Yin and Yang combinations produce all the created forms, expressed in the eight trigrams

(See the figure in I-Ching, Ballantine Books, New York). When combined two by two, they form the sixty four hexagrams.



C.G. Jung had already drawn the attention of psychoanalysts to the I-Ching, translated from Chinese in 1923 by Richard Wilhelm. More recently, research on the I-Ching was developed on computers and applied to various fields. The theory of acupuncture is based on the balance of Yin and Yang in the human body, and the turning of man the microcosmos with the macrocosmos.

Numerous comprehensive volumes would be required to study the analogous approaches of the Zarathustrian, Hindu, American Indian, Oceanic and other civilizations.

"Humanistic Psychology" has mainly provided a synthesis between millenary, traditional concepts and the works of Freud and his followers (and dissenters). Wilhelm Reich, creator of the Vegetotherapy and of Bioenergetics, and Fritz Perls, father of the Gestalt Therapy. The latter considered that every trauma is associated with a blockage stored in the nervous system itself, resulting in permanent muscular contractions: the body armour. In order to reestablish a free flow of energy, in a lasting way (and not just temporarily, as with acupuncture), the origin of the traumas must be traced back, in order to "rewrite" the defective program of our nervous system's computer: this is traditionally known as "dying to oneself".

To this end, the post-Freudian therapists stress work on the body and regaining a clear consciousness (not only mental and emotional but also physical) of the past traumas (youth, childhood, birth and even intra-uterine life). A range of therapeutic tools is available: bioenergetics (mainly developed by A. Lowen, Pierrakos) stresses physical energies as an attempt to overcome the body armour; Gestalt concentrates on the body-spirit unit, and associates verbal research with the body work, for instance on dreams, and a global consciousness of the Psyche "here and now". The common assumption is that the initial trauma (driven back into the subconscious level because it is too painful to bear) is relieved and endured consciously.

"As long as they are not felt (meaning entirely relived), the primal suffering can have a permanent effect", writes A. Janov in his book, "The Primal Scream" (Putnam, 1970). These blockages must, therefore, be localized as accurately as possible, so as to trace them back to their origin, changing the pathologically ingrained pattern and thus reestablishing the free energy flow.

The Californian therapist, Barry Goodfield, helped make a gigantic step towards the scientific localization of blockages by using video cameras in conjunction with Gestalt and self-hypnosis techniques (refer to my article on Barry Goodfield: "Towards Transpersonal Psychotherapy" in *Self and Society*, Volume 6, Number 12, December 1978, London), and later thermography devices generally used for cancer detection. He puts the person "working on herself" in front of an installation of this type and the muscular tension areas can be read - by means of a camera sensitive to infra-red wavelengths and a computer - on a cathode ray tube. As a person in a state of self hypnosis and under the guidance of the psychotherapist retraces memories that had remained unconscious until then, the progressive disappearance of the blockages can be seen on the cathode ray tube, proving that the notions of energy block and energy flow are not just metaphysical. This is a reality lived and felt by anybody receptive enough to themself, but these intuitive truths proclaimed by clairvoyants and healers from the dawn of humanity to now and disparaged by so-called scientific rationalists, have now been proved through authentic research.

Kirlian photographs, showing this "something" sent out by living creatures will also be used for diagnosis once their interpretation is more elaborated (Thelma Moss and Valery Hunt are working on this project at the U.C.L.A.).

Nevertheless, no technology has as yet approached the investigational accuracy of inward attention, such as in advanced meditation. This is why some "transpersonal growth groups" such as the Video-Gestalt ones, which I lead personally associate the precious "external" facility provided by electronic video cameras, with techniques of concentrating one's attention on oneself, originated in the Far-Eastern traditions. In particular, we use Taoist and Buddhist methods of concentration which develop an attention for the "universal impermanence" which we live here and now through the observation of our internal sensations.

During a weekend Video Gestalt seminar, the participants can see themselves from "the outside" the way the others see them on the TV screen, and compare this image with the internal sensation they have of themselves, and in particular of their tensions. In the confrontation of non-verbal body language, which is a subconscious expression, with conscious verbal language, we help the participant to see their own "non-verbal leaks". For instance, if someone blinks every time he or she calls out their first name while watching their image on the TV set, they will discover what that means for them. Then we will help them to enter a particular hypnotic state which we call self-hypnosis because the participant remains conscious of the "here and now", as well as capable of voluntarily leaving the hypnotic state at any given moment. At the same time, they are able to explore the causes of these tensions in their own past.

By re-living the "primal" scenes that were at the origin of those tensions and blockages, with a clear consciousness of what happened "at that time" and a steady adult understanding of what was felt as being mortally threatening to the self when still a child, people will be able to unplug the tensions accumulated throughout the years. The "old man or woman" will give place to a relaxed and far more lively person relieved of their chains. This liberation does obviously not take place in a single day, but it is much faster and deeper than that reached through, for instance, conventional psychoanalysis. Such steps help the participant to progress toward a more total freedom. Having developed a taste for the well-being of an organism that functions in a harmonious way, he/she may wish to go beyond this level and continue their search for the reasons of suffering. They will then directly reach meditation and realize the truth of the Buddha's words: "Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, being united to what we do not like is suffering, being apart from what we love is suffering, lacking what we desire is suffering".

They will thus be led to further engaging themselves on the Path leading to the discovery of the origin of suffering and its ending, and to go beyond the level of therapeutic requirements in quest for the Ultimate Reality.

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1. Refer to 'La raison du plus fort. Traiter our maltraiter les fous?' by Bernard de Freninville. Seuil ed. Paris.
 2. R.D.Laing. The Politics of Experience. London, Penguin Books. David Cooper. Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry. London: Tavistock Publications. Joseph Berke. Mary Barnes. A Journey through Madness.
 - 3 He narrate his experience in his book, 'The Far side of Madness' (a new insight into schiophrenic's delirium). USA Prentice Hall, 1974.

4. M.Eliade. Illnesses and Initiation Dreams. in 'Shamanism and Archaic Ecstatic Techniques.'

5. C.Castaneda. The Teachings of Don Juan. A Separate Reality. The Road to Ixtlan. Tales of Power. Pocket Books, New York.

6. L LeShan. The Medium, The Mystic and the Physicist. Toward a General Theory of the Paranormal. An Esalen Book. The Viking Press, New York.74.

Thomas O Sargent

Conditioned Meditation

ConServ in Hartford, Connecticut, the United States, had developed a method for assuring that the benefits of meditation and of meditative exercises will be accessible in emergency and in other high stress environments. Such exercises provide a measure of mental flexibility which is characteristically absent in high stress conditions. Cognitive flexibility is essential for assessment of emergency situations. Without it, the rigid programming of the mind is likely to lock onto an initial and incorrect assessment of the emergency. The same programming will filter out all contradictory information, thus supporting the veracity of the incorrect assessment. This is the process which continued for the first two and a half hours of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident.

ConServ uses a method of interrupting this condition in both power plant and medical situations. Briefly stated, cognitive flexibility and personal awareness is developed, and then closely associated with one instrument or control in the work situation. Encounter with that element of the work situation then will automatically elicit the desired elements of flexibility. The learned associations are brought back from the exercise in such a way that the associations themselves can be relied upon to replicate the needed parts of the exercise, even in high stress situations. When they are strongly associated with something in the work environment, the meditative content will automatically become present.

A surgeon in New Jersey uses this method to maintain his flexibility and awareness during stressful situations which may occur during an operation. The instruments he uses remind him of the exercise, in which he reexperienced himself on a ski hill. He can feel the ski pole in his hand, the flexibility of his body and of his response to the environment, and this comes back because