Research Article

Psychotherapy as a Subversive Art

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Psychotherapy is an art: for many practitioners – I count myself among them – this claim has considerable appeal. This may be true even when, in deference to the scientism currently in vogue, some of us select a rather contrite version of the above statement, describing therapy as a science of the art (Schore, 2011). My intention here is not to merely defend the claim, but to see how far it can go. To vaguely endorse it feels apologetic; it also implies a facile polarization between art and science – between a (preferred) subjective, qualitative dimension, and a seemingly objective and quantitative domain.

Besides, it would be wrong to bring art into the equation without some appreciation of the aesthetic experience. In relation to therapy, this requires developing a better grasp of the craft of therapy – of its imaginative response to the sheer elusiveness of mental distress. Appreciating our practice as a craft already frustrates to some degree the neoliberal robotic takeover to which most therapeutic orientations comply. But something more is needed: a pervasive *re-envisioning* of how we understand the craft of therapy and how it may relate to art and aesthetics.

A good place to start when aligning therapy within the domain of art is the notion of *world feeling* articulated by Adorno (2018). The prompt for choosing Adorno emerged partly from the sporadic but meaningful conversations I had with existential therapist Richard Pearce. Richard was keen to explore parallels and discrepancies between Adorno and Sartre, and we both found in the writings of the Frankfurt School useful pointers for a salutary critique of existential therapy. This is admittedly an ambitious task, even more so if considering that England, where I live and work, "had no Frankfurt School, no Sartre, no Lefebvre, nor any Gramsci or Della Volpe" (Anderson, 2021, p. 211), and here I am merely drafting a handful of salient points, encouraged by Adorno's lectures and writings on aesthetics. I will be working on the assumption that much can be gained from parallels between the *aesthetic* response to the work of art and the *therapeutic* response in the clinic. Admittedly, the focus here shifts somewhat: therapy as art comes to mean an imaginative 'aesthetic' rejoinder to the

 doi.org/10.32388/CTXHPD

emergent phenomenon, to the matter at hand – including (and perhaps especially) when the latter is understood as a breakaway, a drift that challenges the subject's pretension to mastery. Therapy then becomes a *subversive* art insofar as it *interprets* the emergent phenomenon as an important moment of departure and deterritorialization. This is not as clear-cut as it sounds but it does entail "turning [a] crisis into a work in progress"[1]. The ambivalent but essential process of interpretation never lets us forget that whatever Apollonian wisdom or insight there is in our strange craft, it is born only in proximity with Dionysian 'madness' – a useful reminder, in times of philistine pragmatism and over-zealous sanitization, of how forever entangled the wound is to the healing and the interpreter to the dreamer.

The subject is decentred in favour of experience and psyche. The name of the strange craft examined here is after all psychotherapy, not egotherapy. It is the self-construct that emerges from the wider experiential and psychical field, not the other way around. And the meeting of the two, otherwise known as *perception* in Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, is where the real psychotherapeutic work occurs.

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Subjective response to a work of art, Adorno tells us, is neither "determinate", "unambiguous", nor designed to formulate definitive "intellectual judgements" (2018, p.206). A finely attuned aesthetic response – for example to the paintings of Manet – apprehends both the "pleasing harmony of colours" as well as the rupture constituted by the "extreme contrasts of colour". The same applies to the simultaneity in the music of dissonance and consonance, with the predominance of the dissonant prompting the listener in some cases to reconsider assumptions and value judgements about what constitutes beauty and ugliness. The work of art, Adorno says paraphrasing Hegel, "does not offer a 'slogan'" (Adorno, 2018, p.208), but takes in instead the contradictions of the world and of human experience.

More to the point, and in a way that is reminiscent of Derrida's discussion of Plato's *pharmakon* (Derrida, 1981), Adorno reminds us that "cognition" (here understood in the broader sense, as knowledge) both wounds *and* heals. The allusion he applies here is from the ancient Greeks: "*trosas iasetai*: he who wounds also heals" (Adorno, 2007, p 53), a source worth noting, as it offers a distinctive variation on the Jungian trope of the wounded healer. Telephus, son of Heracles and a popular tragic hero, was wounded by Achille's spear. The only thing that will heal his wound is that

very same spear. An engraved Etruscan bronze mirror from the second half of the fourth century BC and a marble bas-relief from around the first century BC both show Achilles healing Telephus with the rust from his spear. For Adorno, receptivity to the work of art creates rupture, and it is at the core of this rupture that healing and transformation are to be found. Adorno calls this receptivity to art, to the wound *and* the healing, *world feeling.* Unlike hermeneutics, world feeling is for Adorno capable of holding the intrinsic contradictions found in the work of art.

For Adorno, the hermeneutic/interpretative stance "destroy[s] the whole interwovenness of truth and untruth, the interwovenness of what is alive" (Adorno, 2018, p. 207). What is required instead is to perceive and withstand the alive contradictions and oppositions present in the work, a stance that is more valid than an ideological pursuit of 'Truth'. We go to art as we go to poetry: not for wisdom but for the dismantling of wisdom. Similarly, we go to *psyché* not in search of certainties and corrective answers but for greater learning and deeper appreciation of the aliveness and dialectical ambivalence inherent to existence and immanent in the therapeutic encounter.

A first hypothesis then could be that to conceive of therapy as an art and to practice it as such would mean adopting a counter-hermeneutic stance in favour of a more nuanced aesthetic outlook. In Adorno's own writings, the cultivation of this outlook goes parallel to his critique of Husserlian subjectivity with its attendant "drive to identity", even to "*pure* identity", an 'entity' which, as one would expect in a philosophy of origins such as phenomenology, remains blissfully undisturbed throughout the hermeneutic investigation (Adorno, 1982).

One example of a 'positional' or ideologically interpretative response to art is what Adorno calls "vulgar existentialist interpretations" (2018, p. 207) of Kafka. There is such a thing as "vulgar existentialism", he goes on to say, guilty not only of asinine oversimplifications but also of regaling us with that "atrocious word … *worldview*" (Adorno, 2018, p. 61), a term which has gained some currency in traditional existential therapy. For Adorno, world feeling must replace worldview. Applied to therapy, world feeling becomes Ariadne's thread, leading us out of our baffled wanderings within the hermeneutic maze. It can lead us out of the prison house of 'Being', out of the imbroglios of a circuitous, self-referential Cartesian/Husserlian subject and its attendant bourgeois relational yearnings and conjectures. It can lead us out of the highway to a sideroad then a path fading out to everywhere.

Replacing worldview with world feeling means not succumbing to the sloganeering and the inevitably foreclosed conclusions and judgements often typical of a phenomenological enquiry which is often a

treasure hunt for 'Being'. A vista may then open out to the ambivalent entwining allowing the work of art to incorporate the wealth of the existent. The world feeling is internally articulated as well as historical. In Kafka's novels, it has less to do with the "so-called human condition, a feeling of our God-forsaken, thrown, fear-distorted existence". Instead, it is a "thoroughly modern feeling" that in its own way critiques and reproduces the world, finding a "synthesis" and a "formal law" (Adorno, 2018, p. 208). Crucially, this formal law is not *external* to the material – be it poetry, music, the novel, *or* the emergent phenomenon in therapy – but thoroughly *immanent*, a point also made by Croce (1995) and Benjamin (1988). The aesthetic response is here motivated by a desire to remain near the matter at hand, to the point of *disappearance*. Because what is investigated is no longer the self of the client or patient, this intimacy has nothing to do with merging with the *other* – that persistent shadow in psychotherapy's current fascination with the relational and the intersubjective – but deeper intimacy with the emergent phenomenon.

This deeper intimacy is by its very nature *counter-epistemological* – not in the sense of 'not-knowing', but more an inquisitive gaze on knowledge as fetish and instrument of control. If anything, it positively gestures towards a kind of knowing that is recognition/acknowledgement in the Hegelian sense. The fashionable stance of not-knowing – be it Socratic, humanistic, or existential – simply won't do. Not-knowers protest too much; their championing of not-knowing tends to overestimate the know-how that may just about succeed in controlling events, measuring experience, and appeasing anxiety. What gets forgotten is that knowledge is important – albeit a different type of knowledge that is born of intimacy rather than fear. Knowledge remains important: the stories we tell, the stories traversing the consulting room, are imbued with a more or less conscious pursuit of knowledge; narration – from the Latin *gnarus*, getting to know, is knowledge, a getting closer with the matter at hand. The person who *knows* about art is for Adorno like "a native who knows his way around the city". Only the dilettante keeps saying 'How beautiful, how beautiful, how beautiful!'" (Adorno, 2018, p. 210). When I am close to the emergent phenomenon, I am less likely to be side-tracked by suggestive interpersonal evocations, be they 'I-Thou', deep relating, intersubjectivity, or the evocation of stale mummy-daddy scenarios just behind the stage curtain. I do think that there is some hope after all in phenomenological existential enquiry, despite my inbuilt pessimism on the matter, despite the Heideggerian deviations which have nearly neutered the impact of this approach. But it is a matter of finding the right antidote, something which Adorno, with a little help from Hegel, gives us aplenty.

Genuine aesthetic enthusiasm both fulfils the superficial, hyper-subjective awe and dissipates it within "the intuitive observation of the matter itself" (Adorno, 2018, p 208). Likewise in therapy, genuine enthusiasm for the emergent phenomenon dissolves excessive fascination with the self. For Hegel, artistic enthusiasm entails none other than

> being completely filled with the matter, being entirely present in the matter, and not resting until the matter has been stamped and polished into artistic shape (cited in Adorno, 2018, p. 208).

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This sort of experience – variously described as world feeling as well as aesthetic enthusiasm – is even more valuable for not succumbing to either generic ideational content or the hallowed 'meaning' with which traditional therapists routinely sanctify an allegedly inert existence. We are, in other words, outside the self-bound "epistemological principles" and "principles of action" outlined by Dilthey (1989) – the foundation, by and large, of Husserl's phenomenological project that remains influential in traditional existential therapy to this day. For Dilthey, what is "there for us" can only connect with consciousness through the "inner apprehension of psychic events and activities". These constitute "a special realm of experiences which has its independent origin and its own material in inner experience, and which is, accordingly, the subject matter of a special science of experience" (Dilthey 1989, p. 60). Closely relying on Kant, Dilthey sees this special realm of inner experience not only as separate from external, perceptible objects but as the very "condition of possibility of objects of experience" (Dilthey, 1989, p. 61). This "run-of-the-mill psychology" (Adorno, 2018, p. 210) – the basis of most contemporary psychotherapy – "works with concepts such as 'objective type' or 'subjective type' or similar categories ... without touching on the driving force, the problematic, dark foundation" (Adorno, 2018, p 60).

Psychoanalysis has not shied away from exploring these dark materials. Whether or not it succeeded is another question, but for Adorno it was "certainly better, deeper and less conformist than the kind of psychology used by the Dilthey school" (Adorno, 2018, p 212), and therefore by traditional existential therapy. Psychoanalysis too, however, suffers from this *prejudice of the inner life* and of inner experience, from giving ascendancy to the subject – be it the artist, the viewer/reader, or the patient – at the expense of the matter at hand: the work of art, the emergent phenomenon in the clinic. In that sense, psychoanalysis did not fulfil its promise; it has become another psychology, inescapably

moored, like existential therapy, to that primeval fiction and neurosis: the subject and to the subject primary and static theatre: the family. Excessive focus on the subject meant disregarding the work of art, forgetting psyché, neglecting and/or pathologizing the unconscious, and effectively ignoring the phenomenal field of experience.

"There is something in the work itself that goes *beyond* psychology – Adorno writes – something that is *more than* psychology" (Adorno, 2018, p. 212. An aesthetic experience which understands the work of art as a mere symptom, as a thumbprint of the artist's psychological characteristics is merely *pre*-artistic. Ascribing emergent phenomena in the clinic solely to the client/patient is subjectivist. It falls short of properly addressing psyché. The work of art does not belong to the artist. Psyché does not belong to the person. One and a half-century of bourgeois psychology made us forget this simple truth, and "the more objectified and concretized bourgeois society is, the more it insists that works of art come flying purely from the subject" (Adorno, 2018, p. 213). The more stultified society becomes under neoliberalism, the more it will assert that psychical experience is a mere attribute of the subject. It will also insist that whenever psychical experience appears to exceed our self-bound consciousness, it must be pathologized and, to use a fashionable term, *regulated*.

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Is there *hope* for therapy? Given that hope is according to myth the greatest of evils, unwittingly ejected onto the world by Pandora, the question must be rephrased. Is a *radical* (Pearce, 2016), *counter-traditional* (Bazzano & Webb, 2016)) or even *counter-existential* (Bazzano, 2017) therapy possible? Is there anything within the existential phenomenological tradition that neither substantiates nor bypasses the subject but *emancipates* it? Richard Pearce's answer would be a decisive *yes*, and his resounding affirmation is the reason why there is hope for existential therapy, i.e., why it may be possible to develop the basis for what he called radical psychotherapy. For Pearce (2016), the first crucial step is to maintain "an awareness of the radical foundations of our work. In his view, the life and work of Jean-Paul Sartre – his ingenious *critique* and consistent *praxis*, his weaving of existential theory with a strong ethico-political commitment – constitute the very essence of those radical foundations. In relation to the "dilemma of the self-construct" in particular, the existential tradition has adeptly confirmed the impossible goal of self-knowledge that we are constantly striving for, a goal only realisable in death" (Pearce, 2016). This project is wholly compatible with Critical Theory – not only with the general tenets enunciated in the early days of the Frankfurt School, but

with some of its contemporary manifestations, which understand critique, with Nietzsche, as weaving a "radical theory of illusions" (Harcourt, 2021, p.45) a project of seeing-through the illusions and ideologies (the two terms are interchangeable) of our age. Tommie Shelby (2016, p. 261) provides a rather neat definition of illusion:

> [A] widely held set of associated beliefs and implicit judgements that misrepresent significant social realities and that functions, through this distortion, to bring about or perpetuate unjust social relations.

A radical theory of illusions coincides with the hermeneutics of suspicion, constituting for Merleau-Ponty the very foundation of existential phenomenology. For that reason, it is distressing to realize how *little* and how *reductively* Merleau-Pontian phenomenology – and its sympathetically dialectical relationship with Sartre's philosophical project – has impacted traditional existential therapy, an approach that relies on Husserlian and Heideggerian interpretations of phenomenology.

For Adorno, neither version is compatible with the notion of a critical subject. As he sees it, Husserl's theory assumes the existence of a (Cartesian) subject who inertly perceives an 'objective' reality, whereas with his notion of *Dasein* Heidegger destabilizes the very premises within which a critical subject can be construed. Adorno's critique goes much further, especially in relation to Heidegger. For him there is very little difference between the elevation of existence in *Being and Time* and Kierkegaard's notion of consciousness, what he calls the transparency of the subject in *Sickness unto Death.* Both concepts – subjectivity and Being – fluctuate in equal measure; while the former is deemed 'ontic' "by virtue of its spatial-temporal individuation", the latter is deemed "ontological in the logos" (Adorno, 2007, p. 125). In fact, Adorno adds:

> nothing but propositions could be ontological. The conscious individual (whose consciousness would not exist without him) remains in space and time, in factuality, an entity – he is not Being. In Being – since it is a concept, no immediate datum – lies something of the subject; but in the subject lies the individual human consciousness, and thus something ontic. (Adorno, 2007, p. 125).

That promise implicit within phenomenology stubbornly persists, despite the above valid critique. *To phainomenon* (from *phainein* = to appear) is pure appearance, that is, neither appearance-*of* nor appearance-*for*. The first leads us back to metaphysics and onto-theology (a 'real' and 'sub-stantial' thing underneath or behind). The second brings us back to subjectivism, to an arbitrary centre, the

subject, the one to whom things appear. Both misconceptions have been enthusiastically pursued by traditional existential therapy. A more rigorous study of phenomena inevitably surpasses these two blunders which now seem to constitute the very foundations – separately, and often together – of mainstream psychotherapies. A more thorough study of phenomena would mean seeing appearance, wherever it emerges, as expanding to everything. It would entail retrieving the roots of *epoché*, a radical 'methodology' of perplexity and wonder, all the way back to Pyrrho and Pyrrhonism and, by implication, to the philosophy of Nagarjuna.

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Can psychotherapy become a *praxis*? Can it be, in other words, linked to action, and as such become a political force in the wider, transformational sense of the term? I remember hearing a colleague once being distraught at the use of the term 'praxis' in relation to therapy. "Isn't 'practice' good enough a word?", they wanted to know. But praxis is not practice. Therapy as *practice* suggests a methodology that gets better through further training and experience – as in practising the violin or karate. Therapy as *praxis* is wedded to a more generalized ethico-political commitment geared towards: (a) a refusal to propagate dominant ideologies/illusions; (b) an engagement in a collaborative process of freedom from constrictive ideologies/illusions which maintain the subject captive. This twofold process will be necessarily allied to the societal effort to strengthen a concrete notion of *citizenship* against the ongoing threat of the *de-democratization of democracy* posed by neoliberalism (Brown, 2005) It will be wedded to an effort to retrieve what Hannah Arendt called, in relation to the 1956 Hungary uprising, the "lost treasure" of the "revolutionary tradition" (Arendt 2003, p. 525). The relationship between citizenship and democracy is not natural but dialectical and precarious. There is a lot more to citizenship than the legal right to belong to a particular country. Nor is citizenship a *given*, but instead a 'condition' and a 'tenet' with a long and complex history in political philosophy that runs from Aristotle to Spinoza to Marx and more recently Arendt and Ranciére.

It is not enough to define citizenship in terms of *inclusion* (e.g., with refugees and exiles bullied into the subordinate position of the supplicant) but to assert instead with Jacques Ranciére "the part of those who have no part" (cited in Balibar, 2010, p. 297). But even this generous formula, which gives universal importance to those kept outside the *polis*, risks being hijacked when it is understood as a slogan "for the struggle against exclusion (and thus for 'inclusion') rather than a more fundamental

"enunciation of the principle of radical democracy as *the power of anyone at all*" (Ranciere, cited in Balibar, 2010, p. 297).

There is a world of difference between a notion of citizenship that *pre-exists* concrete interactions between people, and one that is instead *generated* by that very interaction. In a very similar way, when applied to the therapeutic encounter, there is a world of difference between establishing a situational and precarious truth by taking the risk of communication and directing instead the investigation towards the unveiling of a pre-existing truth allegedly granted to the 'expert' therapist. There is no citizenship without community. But the essence of community cannot rest on the dubious notion of consensus nor on an equally dubious notion of belonging. Similarly, in the therapeutic encounter mutuality and relatedness are not a given but are instead precariously negotiated. The asymmetrical therapeutic dyad is an unstable attainment rather than a premise.

There are two models of intersubjective encounter as there are two models of the city. In his seminal discussion, the philologist Émile Benveniste (1971) demonstrated that the customary ranking of reciprocity over belonging is more clearly elucidated by the Latin dyad *civis-civitas* than by the Greek dyad *polis-politès*. While the former highlights the continuous attempt of individual citizens to relate with one another and the social body that is precariously created by that very attempt, the other assumes the pre-existence of a city-state within whose precincts individuals are admitted. Philology may nowadays deservedly be seen as obsolete sophistry, but in the course of its history it has produced remarkable critical thinkers, including Nietzsche and more recently Sebastiano Timpanaro, "one of the purest and most original minds of the second half of the [twentieth] century" (Anderson, 2001, Internet file). In the case of *civis-civitas* and *polis-politès*, their etymology clarifies key "political and symbolic consequences" that can be read "in the legacy of both discourses" (Balibar, 2010, p. 297). As with other dialectical tensions, however (and despite my own instinctive preference for the former), it would be wise to read this friction as a perpetual fluctuation between the two poles which slackens the alleged substantiality of the democratic *polis*. Transferred into the therapy world, the above is akin to appreciating the transformative potential of the inherent precarity of the therapeutic encounter rather than assuming the pre-existence of a relational field.

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The main hindrance in conceiving and practicing therapy along transformative lines may arise from a simple fact. Despite its subversive core, psychoanalysis was steeped from the start in bourgeois

ideology. It was partly as an attempt to deal with the bafflement of the bourgeois subject in finding incongruities within his psyche and nurturing the hope of acquiring self-possession as one claims proprietorship of wife, kids, land, and colony. Understandably, it is hard to shed such an ambivalent and insidious legacy. Once upon a time as a revolutionary class, the bourgeoisie made it gradually possible to imagine the decapitation of a monarch by first concocting in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama the notion of a 'public' who could deconsecrate the king (Moretti, 2013). But those heady days are long gone. The bourgeoisie has skilfully camouflaged (the very word 'bourgeoisie' sounds quaint), and in so doing it has become all-pervasive, triggering an out-and-out *bourgeois entropy* (Pasolini, 2005). As a result, its ideology becomes the only game in town. This is the ideology of no more ideologies, marked by the worship of utilitarianism and efficiency, by the sanctification of comfort, and utterly dominated by the so-called free market. This may look hunky-dory at first, until close observation exposes the sheer insanity of the vicious circle it generates. From scheming to competition to accumulation to cynicism and despair, the hamster wheel of the "deranged accountant" (Clemens, 2013, Internet file) goes full circle by eventually returning to the market, hoping that the very root of the trouble will now absurdly yield a way out.

There is instinctive cunning at work here despite the chirpy gloom and quiet desperation. The modern bourgeois subject can talk the talk. Psychology regales him with a patois which allows him to feign self-awareness. Literature, modulated between high and low according to circumstances, renews in him the quintessential genealogical boorishness identified long before by Nietzsche in his excoriating of cultured philistines. At once liberal and greedy, fixated on hard work and hooked on leisure, the bourgeois, in his current avatar as the middle-class not-dividable in-dividual, effectively altered the very nature of everyday experience. Enter "the relentless grey regularising of everyday life … nothing but [an] interminable filler" (Clemens, 2013, Internet file) – an effective method for interminably deferring living, waltzing between a charity dinner and a Twitter feed, a game of golf and a glimpse at the latest autobiographical novel confirming and sanctifying the very same alternation of duty and leisure, productivity and adventure. Even adventure loses its meaning: for *ad-venture* too, i.e., things to come, the unexpected is duly programmed and monetized before it materializes. Adventure too is a form of investment, not as an event but as a form of capital (Harcourt, 2021).

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Bourgeois therapy regularly (and ritualistically) stresses the importance of boundaries. The often-zealous argument in favour of boundaries tends to understand them as boundaries *of* (limiting the breadth of experience within explicit and implicit rubrics) rather than boundaries *for* (creating a receptacle where experience can freely occur). The difference between the two could not be greater. In the first case, boundaries are walls, and like other bourgeois false spaces, the room encircled by tastefully painted walls resembles a pleasant, air-conditioned prison cell, or the average dentist or surgery room: comfortable, safe, and necessarily sterile. The possibility of anything new emerging is remote. Like a vexing wind from the sea, life is expertly kept at bay as both parties, shackled by an ethical code built on fear, rehearse a predictable script. In the second case, the room invites in the unexpected, in the hope that it may show up. And when it does, the analyst deliberately refrains from policing it, fixing it, or medicalising it. Here boundaries are no longer fences but chalk marks of the type children draw in a hopscotch game. Both parties follow the rules of the games with the seriousness of play rather than the solemnity of the law.

In fact, the rule of law – its genealogy – gives us the key to understanding the way in which ethical boundaries have been conventionally understood in psychotherapy. Born in ancient times and systematized during the Roman Republic (509 to 27 BC), the rule of law is the principle under which all persons, institutions, and entities are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced, and independently adjudicated. At any rate, this is what the official definition tells us. Interestingly (amusingly), the originator of the modern version of this liberal notion was the most illiberal of thinkers, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), "the most important precursor to contemporary liberal legalism" (Hobbes, 1996, p 239) whose positivist treatise *Leviathan*, written in 1651, constitutes the shaky foundation of contemporary notions of legal obligations. The key concept useful to our discussion is that of *hedges*. Laws, Hobbes tells us, are like hedges, useful in helping us not wander astray and "to direct and keep [people] in such a motion, as not to hurt themselves by their own impetuous desires, rashness, or indiscretion" (Hobbes, 1996, p 239).

Left to ourselves, Hobbes believed, humans are bound to be wolves to other humans, as his proverbial formula *homo homini lupus est* had it. This is not only unfair to wolves; it also reveals a belief in a foundational human nature, one deemed to be intrinsically bad and in need of correction through

forceful authority. The notion of hedges in particular is key to appreciating the birth of modern liberal thought, succinctly explained by Bernard Harcourt:

> Laws are intended to facilitate individuals' quest for their self-interest rather than impose upon them ideas or values; ... laws are what render subjects free; ... laws are what guarantee our liberty to pursue our private ends (Harcourt, 2021, p 196)

Laws ensure our contentment, according to Hobbes, a contentment that he understands as security in one's *possessions*. In this sense, Hobbes effectively became the key inspiration for an influential current of liberal thought, possessive individualism (Macpherson, 1962).

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If involved with psychotherapy *theory*, one can either be an academic or a critical theorist. An academic recycles, weaves, and combines to varying degrees of originality or banality a handful of theoretical tenets. Critical theorists engage, confront, go to battle. Academics engage in a practice that is tamed, submissive, and disengaged. Critical theorists act, militate. Academics end up re-tuning and revamping the status quo – no matter how often they use the words 'radical' or 'authentic' in their writing. Critical theorists, on the other hand, want to change the world.

One important step in this direction is to go beyond a parochial defence of one's tribe, parish, or theoretical orientation and consider instead whether a practice or set of practices reinforces or dismantles neoliberal illusions –first among them the ideology of a self-bound, self-existing subject. The second important step is to utilize and creatively build on those elements of critical theory that are useful to a radical praxis.

If therapy is to become praxis – or at least work in collaboration with other disciplines in fostering the emergence of praxis – it must have a close link to the notion of the subject as citizen.

Sartre's life and work testify to the fact that it *is* possible, despite the ingenious refutations of poststructuralism, to be "unarguably, a philosopher of consciousness" *and* a "champion of the oppressed, those whose struggle was to assert their freedom and self-expression" (Pearce, 2016, p. 79)) Sartre's work bears witness, in Richard Pearce's evaluation, to a *dialectical* understanding of subjectivity. Dialectics are key here; they help a practitioner step outside subjectivist and hermeneutic constraints and avoid the *three common pitfalls* found (above all, but not only) in traditional existential

therapy. I have investigated this aspect elsewhere (Author, 2009, 2012) and I will briefly reframe it here.

The *first* pitfall is a (Husserlesque) hermeneutic investigation which begins and ends with the Ithaca of the self (subject) after a lengthy and pointless detour where every emergent phenomenon – be it Cyclops, sorceress, sea storm or sirens – is reduced and assimilated by the omnivorous scientistic self. Why pointless? Because the sailor in question (not a true sailor when you think of it) is neither truly affected nor (dialectically) transformed by his meandering into the churning heart of an 'outside' which is merely an obstacle to his blessed homecoming. The *second* pitfall is the intersubjective refraction of the self via some form of primary identity in a space of dialogue. The third pitfall banks on *immediacy*. Here the otherness of the other is lost in this attempt to reach a Platonic unity with the other. The uniqueness of the other is sacrificed at various altars: the mystique of new age spirituality, the lure of old-age institutionalised religion, the fascination with an abstracted 'Being'.

For Salvador Moreno, the notion of therapy as practice implies that theory comes first, prior to and more important than the relationship developed in psychotherapy. With praxis, Salvador Moreno says, I see myself as being in the world with others and involved in an ethical project of change. Bringing praxis into the equation means that a new term altogether is needed (Moreno, 2021, personal communication). This last point chimes with what Felix Guattari consistently pointed out throughout the 1970s when he confronted the familialism inherent in virtually all psychotherapeutic practices, including anti-psychiatry, in favour of greater emphasis on the socio-political aspect. "What Mary Barnes needed – he wrote – was not more family, but more society" (Guattari, 2009, p. 21)

It is high time for psychotherapy to come of age: to leave behind the Mommy-Daddy scenarios of its own infancy which keep it confined; to resist the allure of neoliberal gadgetry and gimmickry which turn it into another tool in the hands of the reactive forces of stupidity and control. Only then will it fulfil its role of becoming an art and a praxis.

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Declarations

Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.