

THE FUTURE OF PSYCHOANALYTIC EDUCATION: PSYCHOANALYSIS, UNIVERSITIES, AND THE NEW CULTURAL WORLD

by Frederick Feirstein

I've been asked to contribute some ideas about the future of psychoanalytic education after an inspiring two-day conference in which almost every speaker seemed genuinely open-minded about the need to reconcile our differences and reactivate our movement. Some of the discussion had to do with different ways of fighting for recognition in a society that is indifferent to what we do and is ignorant of our clinical work and our century-long literature. Here I'd like to focus on the need to find ways to educate the general public about how long-term treatment can help them and how cognitive behavioral therapists and "coaches" lure people to them by promising them quick, HMO-supported fixes.

What kind of society would even be attracted to unhelpful pop therapies that dumb down our methods and language? Only a non-introspective society, unaware or discrediting of the power of the unconscious and the way it forces the repetition-compulsion. We are dealing with a workaholic society addicted to the Internet and television, one that takes no time to think about much else other than celebrity and schemes about making money. It perceives as anti-democratic high art, which is a hierarchy of talent, but accepts hierarchy in sports. Most importantly, it's a society that has been miseducated in an anti-humanistic university system which bores, confuses, and angers its students. That system for thirty years has been highly politicized largely by Marxists in jeans who profess a manipulative Puritanical Political Correctness and often the most obtuse theorizing of postmodernists – especially the deconstructionists and cultural relativists (though Einstein warned against applying his theory of relativity to culture).

That system announces it is "revolutionary" but it is actually 1960's-style counter-culturalism rigidified into just another form of conservative academicism. Of course, this is nothing new. As we have seen in Napoleonic France and Stalinist Russia, in every revolution content changes but the structure of what's revolted against remains the same – rigidly dictatorial or bureaucratically dictatorial.

Since this societal revolution turned academic in the Western World, the content of what is being taught has narrowed and become even ludicrous. What once had a flexibility somewhat open to psychoanalysis (especially in the golden days of liberal European émigrés and the start of the New Left) has become a rigid structure in which the art of psychoanalysis, like the other high arts, has been shutout by tenured radicals who, when young, talked freedom but tellingly carried around the little red book of Chairman Mao and now welcome Iran's Ahmadinejad and the antisemitic Tom Paulin to speak of how the Jews of Brooklyn should be exterminated. (This phenomenon of simultaneously declaring one's support for freedom while idealizing dictators is the subject matter of another essay.)

Here I'd like to address what can be done and has been done with such a system and how to make what was once our cultural and referral base – universities and their ancillary freelance intellectuals – once

again open to the art of psychoanalysis. I am offering the Expansive Poetry movement, a movement not only in poetry but in representational painting, sculpture, and tonal music, as a model.

In the 1950's and early '60's, before this shift from the flexible true liberalism's and the Old Left's encouraging of psychoanalysis to the later New Left's demeaning of it (and flexibility in all the arts) took place, Lawrence Kubie, especially in *Neurotic Distortions of the Creative Process*, defined health simply as flexibility and rigidity as pathology. If he were alive today he would have us treat the rigid academic system as another pathology and to try for its and our own sake to find ways to make it more flexible and return it to welcoming our clinical art and cultural leadership.

When the Expansive Poets reached their artistic maturity, they found that the range of their art was rigidly frozen, freezing out all but the short, free-verse, imitative Confessional poem (I then wrote that it belonged on the couch) and the brief journal-like lyrics narrowly imitative of Dr. William Carlos Williams. Gradually, by the example of their published poems and heated criticism, these poets slowly lit up the curiosity of once-lively scholars and critics, and the large numbers of conformist creative-writing workshop poets. People became attracted to the movement's combining abandoned style – meter and rhyme – with colloquial diction (which had never been abandoned in rock and rap music). They became attracted to the broader content and vision of our narrative and dramatic poems which they couldn't get in the brief free-verse quotidian lyric.

As for their criticism, they wrote plentiful essays and gave many talks which countered the preponderance of obtuse theories about genuine literary criticism. They called for there-opening of poetry criticism to the actual work of the masters of form and narrative in poetry. Some of those who could read what amounted to postmodernist literary gibberish countered it with solid arguments or satires such as Paul Lake's little essay in which he had the serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer physically deconstruct the icon of postmodernism, Jacques Derrida.

As the literary world and some of the academic world took interest in their work, the Expansive Poets were able to get a real platform by becoming editors of the three most influential literary journals: *The Kenyon Review*, *The Hudson Review* and *Poetry*. Essays and books about their work began to come out and finally English Departments found themselves making their work required reading. If we psychoanalysts do something similar – as some of us have begun to do – we might regain our base in the all important universities and with the ancillary freelance critics. With such a base, we might find ourselves becoming again not only the most important practitioners of treatment, but be looked to as cultural leaders as well. That the liaison with a few universities has begun to happen can be seen in my own institute NPAP's tie-in with the philosophy department of the New School and N.Y.U.'s Asian/Pacific American Institute. I have learned from members of the NAAP Board that this is also beginning to happen in other institutes around the country. On a closing note, I'd like to make a pitch for what perhaps wrongly has been called "lay analysis" in the time of the medical model. Half of the members and students at NPAP are from other fields in the Humanities. Once such people begin lecturing and writing for the general public about psychoanalysis from their experience in their other fields, then perhaps we will become part of a new *zeitgeist*, which in the rubble of the past Thirty Year Cultural War includes a fascination

with the unconscious. Who knows, eventually psychoanalysis might again become what W.H. Auden in 1939 called “a whole climate of opinion.”

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