

## ALL POWER TO THE DEVELOPING!<sup>1</sup>

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Over nearly three decades we have described our work (our politics) in many different ways. Perhaps this is an expression or result of differing elements of our joint subjectivity—a moral and scientific aversion to labels and being labeled, an intellectual delight in the search for a (never-realizable) linguistic precision, a strong disbelief/mistrust of consistency, a political passion for creating something new out of what exists (the old), a desire to speak to and with those for whom our work (our politics) has some relevance or interest (and those whose work we find relevant or interesting), a playful pleasure in and tactical commitment to provocation.<sup>2</sup> With all of that, we are of course (hopefully) responding to a changing world.

Our initial formulations, in the late 1970s, drew heavily on the Marxist conceptions of alienation and class struggle. At the same time, our characterization of social therapy (the centerpiece of our psychological work and the subject of this essay) as “the practice of method” (Hood [Holzman] and Newman, 1979) was meant to underscore that it was Marx as revolutionary methodologist more than Marx as brilliant political economist and revolutionary (albeit modernist) that inspired and taught us so much. As we put it then,

Thus, the Marxian dialectic is not merely another paradigm (an economic interpretation) or indeed even another *method to be practiced*. It is, rather, a new understanding of understanding. Far from being a new *method to practice*, Marxism is insistent that human understanding and its highest form, revolutionary activity, is the *practice of method*. Marxism is profoundly practical, not in the sense of being a practice *derived* from a theory and/or method, but in the sense of being a theory and/or method which *is* a practice. (Hood [Holzman] and Newman, 1979, p. 3)

From the beginning we also drew upon the conceptions of Lev Vygotsky (whom we relate to as Marx’s follower)—for example, in describing social therapy (the practice of method) as tool-and-result methodology for re-initiating human development. Marx and Vygotsky, it seemed to us, were identifying (in different realms of social life) human beings as revolutionary, practical-critical, activists (or activity-ists). While a constant presence in our many articulations of social therapy, at times revolutionary activity may have seemed as background to another concept we wanted to convey (for example, “anti-psychology,” “anti-paradigm,” “cultural-performatory approach,” “performative therapy”) or to another source of inspiration (as in “Vygotskian-Wittgensteinian synthesis,” or “postmodern therapy”). In this essay, we move revolutionary activity to the foreground as we attempt, yet another

time, to describe our work (our politics). The term that feels right to us in these twenty-first century post-days (post-communist, post-Marxist, post-structuralist, postmodern) is postmodern Marxism. The invitation to contribute to this special issue of *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* has been the occasion for us to explore and better understand our work from this perspective. To begin, we return to Marx.

### **Class Struggle and Revolutionary Activity**

One can see in all of Marx's writings two lines of practical-critical thought: 1) class struggle and 2) revolutionary activity. The oft-quoted opening of *The Communist Manifesto* is a concise illustration of the former: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels, 1987, p. 12). Marx's somewhat less familiar third thesis on Feuerbach illustrates the latter: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*" (Marx, 1974, p. 121). In Marx's worldview, *class struggle* forefronts the anti-capitalist and deconstructive, while *revolutionary activity* forefronts the communistic and reconstructive. Together, they could transform "all existing conditions." In some of his writings, for example the following passages from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx made clear the necessity of synthesizing the two.

In order to supercede the *idea* of private property communist *ideas* are sufficient but *genuine* communist activity is necessary in order to supercede *real* private property. (Marx, 1967, p. 149)

and

*Communism* is the *positive* abolition of *private property*, of *human self-alienation*, and thus the *real appropriation* of *human nature* through and for man. It is, therefore, the return of man himself as a *social*, i.e., really human, being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development. (Marx, 1967, p. 127)

and

We have seen how, on the assumption that private property has been positively superceded, man produces man, himself and then other men; how the object which is the direct activity of his personality is at the same time his existence for other men and their existence for him. Similarly, the material of labor and man himself as a subject are the starting point as well as the result of this movement (and because there must be this starting point private property is an historical necessity). Therefore, the *social* character is the universal character of the whole movement; as society itself produces *man* as *man*, so it is *produced* by him. Activity and mind are social in their content as well as in their *origin*; they are *social* activity and *social* mind. (Marx, 1967, p. 129)

The transformation of the world and the transformation of ourselves as human beings are one and the same task (since, for Marx, human beings are both producers and product of their world)—the historic task of the methodology of Marxism. And yet, many readings of Marx (by his followers and detractors alike) either ignore revolutionary activity or subsume it under class struggle as Revolution (that is, a quite specific type of revolutionary activity). And while some of the Marxist Revolutions of the twentieth century were, arguably, successful class struggles, they often failed to engage the masses in continuous, day-to-day revolutionary activity, that is, the simultaneous reconstruction of human beings as *social activity-ists*. Thus, both history and its left analysis have obscured Marx in the direction of over-emphasizing class struggle and neglecting revolutionary activity. With hindsight (but without moral judgement), it looks very much like a tragic mistake. The world historic events of the past two decades—the collapse of communism and the virtually unchallenged dominance of corporate capitalism, in particular—urge upon us, as Marxists, a re-examination of class struggle and revolutionary activity as two sides of the anti-capitalist coin. Unlike in Marx’s time and through much of the twentieth century, the two might well be at odds today. Class struggle, so vastly diminished in contemporary times, we suggest, has become an outmoded modernist tool, while revolutionary activity is the postmodern *tool-and-result*—simultaneously anti-capitalist and constructive—with which human beings can change the world.

Social therapy is politically and theoretically grounded in a Marxian worldview. What runs through its practice is Marx’s humanism (not to be confused with the non-Marxist humanism that glorifies individualism)—his insistence on the sociality of human beings, as in his characterization of “man himself as a *social*, i.e., really human, being” and of human activity and human mind as “social in their content as well as in their *origin*; they are *social* activity and *social* mind” (quoted above). Social therapy is an attempt to help people create ways to relate *as social*, i.e., human; we call it “social” therapy because we take the fundamental unit (ontology) of human life to be social. As we understand it, Marx’s humanism is best expressed in his conception of revolutionary activity. It is this capacity of human beings that social therapy relates to. In the remainder of this paper, we attempt to show how.

### **The Patient as Revolutionary**

Because we believe, with Marx, that 1) a fundamental human characteristic is being capable of carrying out revolutionary activity and 2) that carrying out revolutionary activity is necessary for ongoing individual and species development, we relate to people as revolutionaries. This feature of social therapy was first articulated in 1986 at the Congress of the Interamerican Society of Psychology, held in the Karl Marx Theater in Havana, Cuba:

We speak of social therapy as revolution for non-revolutionaries. This radical Marxist conception – that the fundamental or essential human

characteristic is being capable of carrying out revolutionary activity (what Marx calls practical-critical activity)—that's the foundation of anything which can be called or should be called a Marxist psychology. Ours is a radical insistence that we not accommodate reactionary society by relating to people—*any* people—as anything but revolutionaries. (Newman, 1991 p.15)

Relating to patients as revolutionaries entails relating to them as world historic in everyday, mundane matters, that is, as social beings engaged in the life/history-making process of always *becoming* (assimilating “all the wealth of previous development”). For what is history/making history if it is not the dialectic what is/what is becoming? It was Vygotsky who gave us a way to actualize Marx's dialectical understanding of history/making history in the service of helping people relate to themselves (that is, practice, or perform) as revolutionaries.

First, Vygotsky provided a new and helpful articulation of dialectics as method, in the process bringing Marx's brilliance to bear on the practical questions of how it is that human beings learn and develop (and how historical conditions have virtually halted these processes). Vygotsky made clear his debt to Marx the methodologist: “I don't want to discover the nature of mind by patching together a lot of quotations. I want to find out how science has to be built, to approach the study of mind having learned the whole of Marx's method” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 8). In our view, he succeeded to a remarkable extent and, while we do not want to patch together a lot of quotations either, we cannot resist providing one more instance of Vygotsky's psychological-scientific understanding (presaging the best of postmodernism): “The search for method becomes one of the most important problems of the entire enterprise of understanding the uniquely human forms of psychological activity. In this case, the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of the study” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65).

Tool-and-result is, it seems to us, a remarkable conception—in being monistically dialectical, it points the way out of the objective-subjective and theory-practice dichotomies that have plagued Marxism, psychology and Marxist psychology for decades. Speaking politically and psychologically, to the extent that contemporary human beings can become world historic (that is, revolutionary), they must exercise their power as methodologists, that is, not merely users of the tools that are currently available but collective creators of new tool-and-results.

Social therapy is one such tool-and-result specifically designed to create emotional (which to us is social) growth. It is a deconstruction-reconstruction of the modernist (that is, capitalist) ontology which admits of no history/history making—human beings are understood to be only *who we are*. And who we

are in late capitalist culture are commodified and alienated individuals, the products of a sick society to which we have adapted. ("Production does not only produce man as a *commodity*, the *human commodity*, man in the form of a *commodity*; in conformity with this situation it produces him as a *mentally* and *physically dehumanized* being," Marx, 1967, p. 111). Transforming this sick society must involve the de-commodification and de-alienation of its human "products." This is neither negative nor destructive, but rather the positive and constructive process of producing sociality. In social therapy's *process ontology*, human beings are both who we are and *who we are becoming*. And who we are becoming are creators of tools that can "abolish the present state of things" (Marx and Engels, 1974, p. 57) by the continuous transformation of mundane specific life practices into new forms of life. Creating these new kinds of tools is the *becoming activity* of expressing—in how we live our lives—our sociality, our adaptation to history, our "species-life," as Marx referred to it ("Individual human life and species-life are not *different things*...In his *species-consciousness* man confirms his real *social life*," Marx, 1967, p. 130).

The work in social therapy is for people to look at what they are doing so as to come to see themselves as engaging in collective creative activity—the activity of becoming. In our culture of commodified "being," however, "becoming" tends to be related to as a metaphor, at best. Social therapy is an attempt to help people relate to becoming not as metaphor, but as a practical-critical, revolutionary activity. And yet, given our culture, what people tend to do is to commodify activity itself, turning it into "another kind of thing." But for us, activity is not any kind of thing. Life (under capitalism) is filled with things, but life itself is not a thing. To the extent that people can come to recognize that life is the activity of living—and not the periodic identification (description) of the components of our lives as certain things—they are helped to deal with the difficulties, the labels, the pains, the unhappiness, the distress, the emotional disorders which are inextricably related to the alienation/commodification of human life.

### **Zones of Emotional Development**

Vygotsky recognized the dialectic of who we are/who we are becoming as critical to learning and development in early childhood. He noted that the critical factor in human relationships is how we relate to little children as ahead of themselves (as who they are and who they are becoming) and it is by virtue of the employment of this creative methodology in every day life that human learning and development occur. He coined the term *zones of proximal development* (usually shortened to *zpd*s) to capture the dialectical and sociocultural nature of this everyday phenomenon. To Vygotsky, learning is both the source and the product of development, just as development is both the source and the product of learning. As activity, learning and development are inseparably intertwined and emergent, best understood together as a whole (unity). Their relationship is dialectical, not

linear or temporal (one doesn't come before the other) or causal (one isn't the cause of the other).

And as activity, the unity learning and development is a social (joint, interpersonal, collective), not individualistic, construction. We grow as a social unit, not individually. Groupings of people construct “zones”—the spaces between who they are and who they are becoming—that allow them *to become*. From this perspective, the zpd is the ever emergent and continuously changing “distance” between being and becoming. An important feature of zpds is that in constructing them, we do things we don't yet know how to do; we go beyond ourselves. This capacity of people to do things in advance of themselves, Vygotsky discovered, is the essence of human growth. Children learn and develop, he said, by “performing a head taller than they are” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102).

As we see it, the zpd is the rejection of the individuated learning and development model that dominates modernist psychology and modernist Marxism. More than deconstruction, however, it offers a positive alternative reconstruction—it suggests that groupings of people engage in the ensemble, dialectical, *performatory* activity of developing. In this way, Vygotsky's zpd transforms stage theory—the idea that individuals (à la Piaget and Freud) and human history (à la traditional readings of Marx) go through a linear, teleological progression. *Stages FOR development* seems a more apt—and relevantly postmodern—characterization of human development (and revolution) than *stages OF development* (Holzman, 1997b).

We coined the term *emotional zpds* to refer to the “therapeutic stages for development” that are social therapy groups (Newman and Holzman, 1993). These groups are typically comprised of 10-25 people, a mix of women and men of varying ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, ideologies, professions and “problems.” Most groups are ongoing (although we do some time-limited groups) and meet weekly for 90 minutes. Groups are flexible yet stable; some people remain for years, others stay a short time and leave, new members join periodically. (Social therapists also do “individual” therapy, and family and couples therapy, but group is the primary developmental modality.)

People come into social therapy groups as they come into any therapy or any group—individuated, commodified and alienated. Shaped by an individuated learning-development model, they want help to change and/or feel better as individuals—an impossibility, we believe, following Vygotsky and Marx. In order to grow emotionally (a social, i.e., really human, practice) this individuated model must be practically critically challenged through the creating of a new socialized helping environment. What social therapists refer to as “building the group” is the deconstructive-reconstructive process in which people come face to face with the limitations of trying to grow as individuals as they participate in the process of collective growing. New emotional growth occurs by virtue of having learned—through creating it—the activity of how to make groups grow.

Making groups grow (and growing by virtue of this collective activity) is accomplished, as far as we can tell, through the exercise of the human capacity to perform. As childhood shows, we are able to become what we are not (if we were not, there would be no development, no civilization, no history). We are performers. But, as Vygotsky has shown, we cannot *perform* as individuals. As individuals we can, at best, behave. The commodified character of alienation in modern society is the ultimate inhibitor of performance. We perform only as a group. To change political matters, we must perform as a group even as we vote as (legalistic) individuals. To change psychological matters, we must perform as/in a group even as we consume as individuals (Newman, 2000b).

In Vygotsky's zpbs of early childhood, children are supported to do what is beyond them, to perform who they are becoming (even as they are who they are). This process of creating the zpd is the joint (ensemble) creation of their becoming language speakers. They learn to speak by playing with language. In social therapy's emotional zpbs, people are supported by the therapist to do what is beyond them (create the group), to perform who they are becoming. Helping people to continuously create new performances of themselves is a way out of the rigidified roles, patterns and identities that cause so much emotional pain (and are called pathologies). In social therapy, people create new ways of speaking and listening to each other; they create meaning by playing with language.

People come into therapy with pain and problems, the pain and problems of being an alien and non-human object to themselves. They speak the commodified language of emotionality. They present their emotional problems in a way that manifests their commitment to their individuated identity—"I have this problem." Language, concept and ontology have become super-alienated as they both give expression to and fuel our super-alienation. Marx well understood the inhumanity of commodification in the early years of industrial capitalism, and his 19th century language is even more hard-hitting when read in relation to 21st century emotionality:

Private property has made us so stupid and partial that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when it is directly eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., in short, *utilized* in some way; although private property itself only conceived these various forms of possession as *means of life*, and the life for which they serve as means is the *life of private property*—labor and creation of capital.

Thus *all* the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple alienation of *all* these senses; the sense of *having*. (Marx, 1967, p. 132)

The poverty of this "sense of having" is what therapists need to deal with. Despite the fact that people come to therapy because they want relief from their emotional

pain, they typically relate to that pain as a prized possession—for some people, as all they “have.” This commodified understanding of human emotionality creates an inner world that is untouchable. It creates ways of relating to others that are contractual and competitive. It creates an acquisitive form of life. It creates an impoverished repertoire of emotional responses to life situations. As therapists, we must find ways to strip away the commodification that over-determines not only how we see and feel, but also how we speak and relate, and what we believe to be possible.

In social therapy, the stripping away of the commodification of emotionality is not a negative process but, following Wittgenstein (Newman and Holzman, 1996, 1999), a constructive one. Our goal is to help people to grow emotionally/create a new culture. In ordinary, non-Marxist language, it is a process of helping people *to be giving in a culture of getting*. A principle-and-discovery (tool-and-result) of the social therapeutic approach is that what is most helpful to people emotionally—in this culture that has socialized us to get as much as we can while giving as little as we can—is not getting more, but giving. What we mean by giving is actively sharing our emotional “possessions” (decommodifying them). Understandably, at first people cannot imagine organizing their lives in this new way (“living as giving”) for fear of being ripped off/taken advantage of or because they believe they have nothing to give (or both). But by participating in the process of creating environments in which emotional giving is practiced, people discover that they can give and that this activity is generative of new, richer emotional options (Newman, 1994).

To return to Marx’s language, private property has indeed made us “stupid”—emotionally stupid. As revolutionaries, social therapists believe that in the absence of creating a new emotional culture—a more social culture of giving—there is not much hope of doing very much about our economic and political stupidity.

### **Zones of Meaning Making**

Marx was clear as to why transforming human subjectivity was as necessary as transforming economic and political structures: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force” (Marx and Engels, 1974, p. 64). Our “mental production” is shaped by the dominant culture. The getting culture (private property and the human self-alienation it produces) organizes how we think and speak and how we understand what it is to think and speak. In social therapy we try to help people come to see that what they are saying to each other is mediated by commodified conceptions of language and of meaning, producing us as mentally and physically de-humanized beings and profoundly limiting our capacity to develop. We try to teach people how to create meaning because giving new meaning to what we identify as “our problems” transforms their ontology. Loosened from the inner world, they become touchable, movable, changeable.



The individuated members of social therapy groups come together week after week. The social therapist works with the group (not the individuated selves that, reductionistically speaking, comprise the group) to organize itself as an emotional zpd. Members of the group raise whatever they want and however they want (how they're feeling, an emotional problem, a relationship going bad, something that happened to them, etc.). The work of the group is figuring out how to talk about what they want to talk about—*How can we talk so that our talking helps build the group?* This—not the substance of talk (its aboutness)—is the focus of the group's activity. The authority of commodified language is challenged as people falteringly attempt to converse in this new way, to create meaning together and, in that process, they come to see that what they are saying to each other has no meaning other than what they create—that in talking we are *creating* (not merely saying, i.e., describing) what is going on and that we understand each other by virtue of this shared activity.

This work of the group can be seen as a contemporary concretization of what Marx articulated more than 150 years ago: “The fact that under favourable circumstances some individuals are able to rid themselves of their local narrow-mindedness is not at all because the individuals by their reflection imagine that they have got rid of, or intend to get rid of, this local narrow-mindedness, but because they, in their empirical reality, and owing to empirical needs, have been able to bring about world intercourse” (Marx and Engels, 1974, p. 106).

It has become clear to us that the human ability to create with language is, for adults as much as for little children, a continuous process of creating who we are becoming. Working with people's initial individuated, problem-oriented presentations, the social therapist's task is to lead the group in the activity of discovering a method of relating to talk relationally rather than individualistically, of focusing on the *activity* of the human interaction. In this process people come to appreciate what—and that—they can create, and simultaneously to realize the limitations of trying to learn, grow and create individually. They learn how to build the group and to realize that growth comes from participating in the process of building the groups in which one functions. This new learning, in Vygotskian fashion, rekindles development—development by virtue of the group growing. With the change in therapeutic focus—from the individuated self who discovers deeper insights into his or her consciousness to the collective engaged in the continuous activity of creating a new social unit (the emotional zpd)—emotions become less a “means of the life of private property” and more the ongoing production of our “species-life.”

### **“How Do You Feel?” “I Don't Care. Let's Develop!”**

By now it should be clear that social therapy is not designed to help individuals with their individual problems. Put bluntly, the message of social therapists to clients is,

“I don’t care how you are—and neither should you.” “How you are” is not a developmental or revolutionary issue. It is simply a reinforcement of the authoritarian, class-dominated commodification that psychologists call “sense of self.” Social therapy engages clients in continuously exploring “What is to become of you?”—not as moral critique or rhetorical existential question but as practical-critical revolutionary practice. It is a demand, á la Vygotsky, to participate in developmental activity. Development—for individuals, for “the class” and for the species—comes not from some abstract ideological commitment to being a better person or to making a better world, but only from a participatory process in which people exercise their collective power to create new environments and new emotional growth.

As we said at the beginning, the events of the past century have shown that people cannot produce revolution with Revolution alone. The primacy of class struggle over revolutionary activity and the over-reliance on a linear-causal model of revolutionary change has failed. This is why, as revolutionaries, we concern ourselves with the subjective transformations that are required in order to effect revolutionary (developmental) social change and why we have tried to come up with another way of looking at the world that does not invoke a linear-causal model.

It is people—Marx made plain—who change the world. But what kind of people? Some read Marx as saying, “The working class” or “The proletariat.” We read him as saying, “People who are developing.” He could not have put it more clearly than in the following passage from *The German Ideology*: “We have further shown that private property can be abolished only on condition of an all-round development of individuals, because the existing character of intercourse and productive forces is an all-round one, and only individuals that are developing in an all-round fashion can appropriate them, i.e., can turn them into free manifestations of their lives” (Marx and Engels, 1974, p. 117).

ALL POWER TO THE DEVELOPING! is, then, not a political slogan; it is a postmodern “scientific” fact. Power, the only real positive antidote to authority, is a dialectical product of the revolutionary activity of developing. It is Marxism as revolutionary activity—not as theoretical abstraction or mere deconstructive class struggle—that will, perhaps, soundly eliminate all hitherto existing oppressive conditions. The ultimate Marxist irony, it seems to us, is that class struggle can only be engaged in “individualistically” (from the bomb-throwing anarchist to Stalin). Revolutionary activity cannot.

## Notes

1. Draft of article in *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 2003, 3, 8-23.
2. The themes of our writings over the years, not surprisingly, reflect one or another of these “joint subjective elements.” For example, “Diagnosis: The Human Cost of the Rage to Order” (Gergen and Newman, 1999) highlights our aversion to labels. Our writings on Wittgenstein (in, for example, *Unscientific Psychology* and *The End of Knowing* (Newman and Holzman, 1996, 1997) reflect his and our discoveries in pursuing unattainable linguistic precision. “Undecidable Emotions” (Newman, in press) brings the foundations of mathematics to bear on the issue of inconsistency. The best example of our desire to create something new out of the old is, perhaps, *The End of Knowing* (Newman and Holzman, 1997). Some of our writings address specific collegial audiences, for example, Vygotskians—“The Developmental Stage,” “Performative Psychology: An Untapped Resource for Educators,” *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist* and *Unscientific Psychology* (Holzman, 1997a, 2000; Newman and Holzman, 1993, 1996), social constructionist and narrative therapists and other postmodernists—*Performing Psychology*, “Does a Story Need a Theory?” and “Beyond Narrative to Performed Conversation” (Holzman, 1999; Newman, 2000a; Newman and Holzman, 1999) and critical and Marxist psychologists—“One Dogma of Dialectical Materialism,” “The Performance of Revolution,” “The Relevance of Marx to Therapeutics in the 21st Century” and “Against Against-ism” (Newman, 1999, 2000b; Newman and Holzman, 2000a and b). “Against Against-ism” is also a tactical and playful provocation.

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