Constructing Social Therapeutics

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Social therapeutics is a 40+ year-old methodology for reinitiating the development of persons and communities through activating their capacity to play, perform, philosophize and, in that process, create new ways to be and see and relate. It is, at the same time, a social change effort rooted in the belief that (the activity of) ongoing social-emotional-cultural-intellectual development is an essential component of world-changing. In other words, to paraphrase Marx, the changing of the world and of ourselves is one and the same task.

Social therapeutics has its origins in social therapy, the radically humanizing psychotherapy developed in the 1970s by Fred Newman (Holzman and Mendez, 2003; Newman, 2009). In subsequent decades, along with the expansion of social therapy practices from NYC across the US, the approach was also taken out of the therapy office, becoming—by the 21st century—the transdisciplinary practice of relating to people of all ages and life circumstances as social performers and creators of their lives. Social therapeutics continues to be practiced, advanced and broadened both at the East Side Institute ("Institute"), which is its headquarters in New York City, and across the globe by hundreds of scholars and activists; psychologists, counselors, social workers and therapists; educators and youth workers; doctors and nurses; social justice artists and activists, and community organizers.

This chapter shares highlights from the decades-long process of broadening and transforming the methodology from a non-diagnostic therapy to a postmodernized socio-cultural psychology of development to a new approach to social-cultural change known as performance activism. There was no plan to this process. It was not rational or systematic. Rather, the process emerged from what we saw happening, both on the ground in our own activities and in the broader culture. It derived from the activity of building organizations that challenged the way established institutions do things and in

organizing people to build with us and create institutions and activities that humanize rather than harm.

Social therapeutic methodology was greatly influenced by three intellectual traditions: Karl Marx, the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky and the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, all of whom had radically social understandings of human life and activity. To them, how we feel, see, understand, speak and relate are not merely social in origin but social when enacted or, in our preferred language, performed.

A Thumbnail Sketch of Social Therapy

Originating in the 1970s as part of the social-cultural change movements of the era, social therapy was similar in some ways to other new psychologies springing up at the time: it tied the "personal" to the political; it engaged the authoritarianism, sexism, racism, classism and homophobia of traditional psychotherapy; and its reason for being was that living under capitalism makes people emotionally sick and the hope was that therapy could be a tool in the service of progressive politics.

What distinguished social therapy from the other radical therapies of that period was its engagement of the philosophical underpinnings of psychology and psychotherapy. It rejected explanation, interpretation, the assumption of self-contained individuals, the notion of an inner self that therapists and clients need to delve into, and other dualistic and problematic foundations of traditional psychology, underpinnings that have become familiar territory for social constructionist scholars and practitioners.

The primary environment for social therapy was and remains the group. Groups vary in size from therapist to therapist and location to location, with 10-20 people being optimal. Groups are heterogeneous, with people of varying ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, professions, backgrounds and life styles, and "presenting problems." (Some social therapists also run family groups, teens groups and children's groups.) Most social therapists run their groups for 90 minutes weekly. These groups are ongoing, with new people joining and others leaving at will. Unlike most group therapies where the group serves as a context for the therapist to help individuals with their emotional problems, in social therapy the group—not its individual members—is the therapeutic unit.

People come into social therapy, as they do most therapies, wanting help. They typically want to know "what's wrong with them," how to fix it, and to feel better. The social therapist will tell them that social therapy is not designed to help them with their individual problems or help them feel better. It is, rather, designed to help them develop, that is, to generate qualitative transformation, to create new emotional growth through participating with their group members in building something together—namely, their group. This ongoing process is effective in deconstructing the deep-rooted senses of self and identity and reconstructing the concept of social relationship. *"The great thing about individual therapy is that you know you're the most special person in the room. In group, it's not about being the most special person in the room. It's about what you can give to the group. That means you have to think about whether or not special is something that helps you emotionally in therapy or in your life."* (East Side Institute https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czN33b2CA7E&t=12s)

The Development Community—Another Thumbnail Sketch

You can't understand social therapy—or its effectiveness in helping people in emotional distress—separate from the community which builds it and which it builds.

Throughout social therapy's formative years and first few decades, Fred Newman spoke words to this effect. Newman was the creator of social therapy and the architect of its community's many diverse projects for nearly forty years from the 1970s until he passed away in 2011. He was also my intellectual mentor and partner in understanding and teaching social therapy, articulating its conceptions and practice in terms relevant to a variety of political, philosophical and psychological traditions, and bringing its methodology, social therapeutics, well beyond the therapy room.

The type of community Newman was referring to, the one we are building to this day, is fluid and always emergent. It is not defined by location, membership or social identity. In the 1990s we began to call it a "development community"— that is, a community that supports the building and development of community and, thereby, the people who participate in it (Newman, 1991; Newman and Holzman, 1996). Furthermore,

the activities and goals of such a community are generated simultaneously (as tools-and-results, Newman and Holzman, 1993).

The realization that we were building a development community came many years after its beginning. A working-class New Yorker and Korean War veteran who went on to receive a Ph.D. in philosophy of science and the foundations of mathematics, Newman was radicalized during the social upheavals of the 1960s, like millions of others. He resonated with how movements were challenging the Western glorification of individual self-interest and was excited by the grassroots communal experiments to transform daily life taking place at the time. He felt the need to confront America's failure to honestly deal with its legacy of slavery and racism, as its African American population remained poor and shut out of America's prosperity.

Newman taught philosophy at US colleges and universities for a few years and then, skeptical that social change would come from the university campus, he left academia with a handful of student followers. They set up community organizing collectives in working class neighborhoods of NYC and became involved in welfare rights organizing. During the 1970s, their work took two directions: organizing in the poorest, mostly African-American, communities of New York City to activate and empower people politically; and engaging the subjectivity of community organizing and the mass psychology of contemporary capitalism.

Engaging Mass Psychology and Tactics to Transform It

It was during this time that I met Newman and his fellow activists. I had just completed my Ph.D. in developmental psychology and had a post-doc at Rockefeller University working in cultural psychologist Michael Cole's Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition. Our work there confronted the validity of the experimental method of cognitive psychology (Cole, Hood and McDermott, 1978). If psychological theory and findings are generated in the laboratory (or under experimental conditions designed to replicate the laboratory), how can they be generalized to everyday life? In other words, did they have any "ecological validity" and, if not, could we develop a methodology for a psychology that *was* ecologically valid? (For a discussion of the problem of ecological

validity and the role of the Rockefeller University research in the overall agenda of cultural psychology, see Cole 1996, Chapter 8, especially pp. 222-258; Holzman, in press).

Newman and I came from different places, me from developmental psychology and linguistics research and Newman from philosophy of science and community organizing. We shared the same dreams for a world without poverty and, while different, our training and life experiences had convinced each of us that psychology as a discipline and as popular culture desperately needed to be transformed. With its individualistic focus, claim to objectivity, emulation and imitation of the physical and natural sciences, and dualistically divided worldview, mainstream psychology was a powerful impediment to ongoing social development and social activism. My own work in language development and the Cole Lab research were rejections, in practice, of the biases of social science conceptions and method. Newman's social therapy was a rejection, in practice, of mainstream psychology and psychotherapy

My own activism up to this point consisted of anti-war marches, impotent fury at my own parents' racist behavior, and never voting for a Democrat or Republican. But empowering poor people politically and engaging the mass psychology of capitalist culture sounded and felt "right" to me somehow, even though I had no knowledge of or prior thinking on either. I began to participate in the group's activities and soon was founding, with Newman and a handful of others, the New York Institute for Social Therapy and Research (NYISTR), a precursor to the current East Side Institute.

The NYISTR, opened in 1978 on Manhattan's Upper West Side, lived up to its name. Newman and 5-7 therapists he trained had busy social therapy practices. My work focused on research, education and training. Therapy was on a sliding scale and during our first years we told incoming clients, "Our aim is to end poverty and we're asking you to pay as much as you can." We developed a two-year therapist training program and graduated 8-12 lay people and credentialed social workers yearly as social therapists. We held dozens of classes and workshops; sponsored guest speakers and forums on topics in psychology, culture and education with leading NYC-based progressives. We engaged academia through publishing articles in psychology and education journals and presenting at conferences. We launched our own journal—*Practice: The Journal of*

Politics, Economics, Psychology, Sociology and Culture—and published essays, reviews, poetry and photographs by ourselves and a variety of invited authors, two issues a year from 1983-1987. From 1977-1987 we held an annual "Marxism and Mental Illness" day-long event with audiences in the hundreds and guest speakers from the psychological and cultural left of the time.

We opened a K-12 school, the Barbara Taylor School, a merger of Vygotskian learning-and-development theory and the progressive traditions of African American community schools, and ran it from 1985 – 1997 (Holzman, 1997). We launched an organization bringing community and professionals together, The Association of Progressive Helping Professionals It grew to 300 members, chapters in seven US cities, and held two national conferences before running its course. Its NYC chapter members went door to door talking to people about social therapy and asking for their financial support to bring social therapy to poor communities. Inviting strangers to support our activities was and remains a mainstay of the Institute and the development community. From the beginning, the Institute and the organization of its community have remained independently funded and built by many hundreds of volunteers

In the early 1980s we opened social therapy centers ("community clinics") in Harlem, the South Bronx, Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn. For four years, we worked to have an impact on the health and mental health of NYC's poorest. We did free blood pressure screening on the streets and invited people to build "Healthy Clubs" with us. We went door to door in public housing to introduce our Stop Abusive Behavior Syndrome program and invite people to a free workshop. Our therapists attracted a small number of people who tried social therapy and stuck with it. However, we never were able to achieve a critical mass to break through the stigma of therapy in poor and working-class communities, especially communities of color, even if—or perhaps especially—we were offering a therapy that related to people as active creators of their lives who could develop emotionally. Our community clinics weren't working in the way we had hoped. They were neither organizing enough people to build with us nor were they attracting enough people to social therapy to have a significant impact on the communities.

This organizing effort was a wonderful failure. While we failed to build sustainable centers for social therapy in poor communities, we made our mark as unique

health and mental health professionals—a group of people of mixed ethnicities and genders who spoke with people on the streets and at their doors, and delivered an invitation and a very radical message. We also experienced first-hand how the psychological establishment so successfully socialized people to the idea that emotional distress is an illness, and what the shame and stigma that this produced among poor people looked like. Perhaps a better tactic would be to try to influence the social workers and other mental health professionals who worked in public and traditional institutions in these neighborhoods. In 1988 we closed the community clinics and began developing ways to attract more people to formally train as social therapists. In addition to our therapist training program, we designed weekend training workshops, a scholarship program and supervision. Dozens of social workers, addictions counselors and others trained with us and added social therapeutic elements to their practices in mainstream institutions.

Putting Social Therapy on the Social Constructionist, Postmodern and Cultural-Historical Map

In the midst of all of this activity, Newman and I found time to look at social therapy and the other organizing work of the community through philosophical, cultural and political lenses.

During this early period, we primarily studied our activities through the lives and works of Marx, Wittgenstein and Vygotsky and their political, philosophical and psychological followers, critical pedagogists such as Paolo Freire and bell hooks, and Black psychologists such as Franz Fanon. We presented our work at psychology and education conferences and published in academic journals, but our engagement with academia began in earnest in the early 1990s with the invitation from editors of a Routledge series to write a book on Vygotsky. In retrospect, I see that invitation as an important moment for us. It provided the opportunity to articulate (and, in that process, discover) the contributions we believed Vygotsky and Wittgenstein were making to a new psychology, with their engagement of the philosophical underpinnings of psychology and psychotherapy especially valuable. It also helped us realize our

responsibility to engage with and build relationships with researchers and scholars if we were serious about transforming the mass psychology of US culture.

With *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary Scientist* (Newman and Holzman, 1993), Newman and I presented what we took pains to say was "our Vygotsky." We cautioned readers to approach the book not as *about* Vygotsky, but rather as what we saw as his revolutionariness and significant discoveries from the vantage point of "who we are and what we have done" (Newman and Holzman, 1993, p. X).What we saw in Vygotsky's writings was that human individual, cultural and species development is always social; it is produced by and produces activity, which is qualitative and transformative (unlike behavioral change, which is particularistic and cumulative). We took Vygotsky to be a forerunner to social therapeutics and its *psychology of becoming* in which people experience the social nature of their existence and the power of collective creative activity in the process of making new tools for growth (Holzman, 2009).

We brought Wittgenstein into our exploration of Vygotsky's work to see what they might teach us if the two of them were synthesized. Their critiques of dualism, especially inner-outer and objective-subjective, despite stemming from such different concerns and in such different contexts, were remarkably similar and powerful. They both spoke of language as *activity* and offered alternatives to the correspondence theory of language—Wittgenstein's *language games* and Vygotsky's *language completing, not expressing, thinking*—that helped us see the dialectic of thinking-speaking and the development of meaning making. Wittgenstein wrote of games and Vygotsky of play. We put their insights together and found how human development happens and how it is stifled. Their radical ways of exposing the limitations of modernism, in both its Western science and Marxist manifestations, were all the more remarkable for them being modernists! Newman and Holzman, 1993, 1996, 1997).

Newman and I devoted much of our subsequent writing to advancing our synthesis, showing it in practice in our community-building and social therapeutic work, and sharing our understandings with varied psychological, therapeutic, educational and political audiences, including social constructionists (Holzman and Newman, 2004, 2012), narrative psychologists (Newman, 2000; Newman and Holzman, 1999); cultural historical researchers (Holzman, 2006, 2009, 2014), and critical psychologists (Holzman,

2014, Newman and Holzman, 2003). Since Newman's passing, my colleagues and I have continued to bring our Vygotsky, our Wittgenstein and the methodology they contributed to creating into other fields, including socio-cultural theory and second language learning (Holzman, 2018, Holzman, in press), play research (Lobman, 2011; Lobman and O'Neill, 2015), health care (Massad and Silverman, in press), higher education (Martinez, 2011, 2017), and organizational development (Holzman, 2005; Salit, 2016).

Method as Tool-and-Result. Among the key elements of our methodology is the concept of tool-and-result. For Vygotsky, the subject of psychology should be what is unique to human individual, cultural and species development—activity. We human beings do more than respond to stimuli, acquire societally determined and useful skills, and adapt to the determining environment. We engage in qualitative and transformative social-cultural activity; we create culture; we transform both ourselves and the circumstances determining us. Human development is not an individual accomplishment but a *socio-cultural activity*.

Science with its objectivist epistemology would not work to study activity, for it denies science itself as a human, meaning-making activity and mistakenly treats human beings as natural phenomena. A natural science psychology contains "an insoluble methodological contradiction...it is a natural science about unnatural things" and produces "a system of knowledge which is contrary to them" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 298). What was needed was a non-dualistic method, a precondition of which was a non-dualistic *conception of method*, one in which "the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of the study" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65). Rather than method being a tool to be applied, Vygotsky's method is an activity that generates both tool and result at the same time and as continuous process. Tool and result are not dualistically separated, neither are they the same or one thing. Rather, they are elements of a dialectical unity/totality/whole. Newman and I called this *tool-and-result methodology* (Newman and Holzman, 1993).

Creating Zones of Development. Another feature of our methodology stems from Vygotsky's most well-known concept, the zone of proximal development (zpd). Most often described as the difference between what a child can do alone and with a more skilled other, the zpd is so much more—and other—than that. It is part of Vygotsky's

argument that learning and development are a dialectical unity in which learning does not follow but "leads" development, his refutation of the dominant view that learning is dependent upon and follows development, and his criticism of traditional instructional and assessment practices (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). He asserted the socialness of the learning-leading-development process and the role of joint activity and collaboration in children's lives. He understood development (qualitative transformation) as a collective accomplishment— "a function of collective behavior, a form of cooperation or cooperative activity," and a "collective form of 'working together" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 202). In more contemporary social constructionist terms, development grows from responsiveness and relationality.

When Newman and I put this together with what we understood to be Vygotsky's tool-and-result method, the zpd transformed from a thing to a process. We now saw it as collective activity whereby the creating of the "zone" simultaneously produces the learning-and-development of the collective. It is dialectical, tool-and-result activity, simultaneously the creating of the zone (environment) and what is created (learning-and-development). This new understanding of a developmental way of working together/development, we believed, should not be confined to childhood, which was Vygotsky's focus, but had broad implications for reinitiating development across settings and the life span.

Playing and Performing as Meaning-Makers. Aided by Wittgenstein, Vygotsky's unpacking of the young child's language learning zpd is illustrative of the interplay of relationality and responsiveness with the being/becoming dialectic space in which social therapeutics works and plays.

When babies begin to babble they are speaking before they know how. The speakers around them create conversation with them by accepting and responding to their babble as if they understood it. Mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings and others relate to them as fellow speakers, feelers, thinkers and makers of meaning. This is what makes it possible for very young children to do what they are not yet capable of. The babbling baby's rudimentary speech is a *creative imitation* of the more developed speaker's speech. At the same time, the more developed speakers "complete" the baby, and the "conversation" continues.

Completion is the partner to imitation in the language-learning zpd. Completion is a rejection of the common expressionist or pictorial view of language, i.e., that when we speak we are expressing ourselves (our thoughts, feelings, etc.). Speaking is not the outward expression of thinking; thought "is not expressed but completed in the word" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 251). The relationship between them is dialectical; each is part of a unified, transformative process that entails thinking-speaking

Newman and I broadened this insight of Vygotsky from the individual to social units. It occurred to us that if speaking is the completing of thinking, if the process is continuously creative in social-cultural space, then the "completer" does not have to be the one who is doing the thinking. Others can complete for us. Indeed, if they didn't, then how would very young children be able to engage in language play, create conversation, and speak before they know language? Creative imitation and completion create the relational and responsive ensemble performance of conversation, it turns out, among people of all ages and cultures. Meaning is social; it emerges in people's activity as tool-and-result, that is, something new is created out of the instrumental, tool for result linguistic tools.

Our conviction that "meaning emerges in activity" owes something to Wittgenstein in addition to Vygotsky. While most readers of Wittgenstein take him to locate meaning in use, we take Wittgenstein at his word when he wrote, ""the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life," Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 11). This is both consistent with and adds to Vygotsky's focus on the joint activity of creating the language learning zpd. Additionally, completion and creative imitation are moves within a kind of language play, a language game, in Wittgenstein's sense.

The last feature of Vygotsky's psychology I want to share was critical not only in our engagement with postmodern and cultural historical psychology but also in the development of social therapeutics as a new approach to social-cultural change known as performance activism.

Play and Performance. When discussing the role of play in early child development, Vygotsky remarked, "In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself" (1978, p. 102). What is it about play that actualizes the "head taller" experience? Might

some of these features be present in activities we do not typically identify as play? Are there experiences that actualize the "head taller" experience for people across the life span?

Vygotsky's understanding of play as essential for development never went beyond early childhood. Given that so much of our development community's activities involved older children and adults, we were eager to make use of what we believed was a very important discovery of his to support the development of people of all ages. In an essay on the development of personality, Vygotsky noted that the preschool child "can be somebody else just as easily as he can be himself" (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 249). Vygotsky attributed this to the child's lack of recognition that s/he is an "I" and went on to discuss how personality and play transform through later childhood. This astute observation of the young child's *performance ability* struck home.

The other grouping of people who are "just as easily someone else" are performers on the stage. In the theatrical sense of the word, performing is a way of taking "who we are" and creating something new through incorporating "the other." With little children, relational activity that embraces the being/becoming dialectic creates a newly emerging speaker; on the stage, it creates a newly emerging character. Influenced by Vygotsky's search for method and the powerful impact of the theatre on people both on and off stage, Newman and I came to see performance as a new ontology, both the process and product of human development. People are primarily performers, not thinkers or knowers. Performing as someone else (being oneself and other than oneself) is the source of development— for Vygotsky, at the time of life before "I" and its social constructed fixed identity; for the international development community— throughout the life course. Social therapeutics has evolved, over the decades, into a conscious effort to revitalize this human capacity and to organize and support performance activism as a new kind of social activism and as a humanizing mass psychology.

It may well be, as Descartes believed, that "I think, therefore I am." (This, it seems to me, is the modernist bias of mainstream psychology.) Social therapeutics has a different aphorism: "We perform, therefore we become."

"Completing" the Performance Turn

Vygotsky was not the only catalyst for our "performance turn." So were hip-hop and theatre. They came to us and us to them through our community and political organizing. Just as social therapy emerged as part of a larger, multi-faceted engagement of society with an eye towards transforming it, the journey from social therapy to social therapeutics to performance as a new form of social activism was inseparable from community and political organizing efforts to recreate the-world-as-it-might-be—more equitable, democratic, cooperative, peaceful and developmental.

During the 1970s, the development community participated in the mass movements of the time: the peace movement; defense of political prisoners; solidarity movements in Central America and Africa, etc. We worked to build independent labor unions and became active in left-of-center electoral politics. As with social therapy, we tried a lot of things, many failed, a few got traction.

We did most of our community organizing among people living in poor African American and Latino neighborhood of NYC. By the end of the 1970s our most successful mass organizing effort was the New York Unemployed and Welfare Council, a union/advocacy group for people on welfare. The Council at its height had approximately 10,000 members and active chapters throughout New York City. It was the organizing of the Council that first established a base for our development community in the poorest strata of New York City's African American and Latino communities, a connection that remains active to this day.

The Council did not survive far into the 1980s, but the base it established would become the foundation of the New Alliance Party (NAP), an independent pro-socialist electoral party that had some success in New York City in challenging the Democratic Party's lock on the Black, Latino, Jewish and gay communities and which eventually had active chapters in 28 states. In 1988, NAP ran Dr. Lenora Fulani—a developmental psychologist who I had met at Michael Cole's Lab and who directed our Harlem social therapy community clinic—for president of the United States. Thanks to an intense national organizing effort, Fulani became the first woman and the first African-American in history to be on the presidential ballot in all 50 states—and she did it as an independent, an effort that included gathering 1.3 million ballot access signatures by

volunteer supporters. (The development community remains active in independent politics, currently through efforts to develop a movement of independent voters—over 40% of the US electorate—in partnership with other Americans to reform the US political process.)

In the course of the Fulani campaign hundreds of New Yorkers fanned out across the country to lead the ballot access and fundraising efforts. Some of them were trained social therapists, many more had been/were members of social therapy groups. As a result, new social therapy practices were established in a dozen cities around the country, some of which—in San Francisco, Boston, Philadelphia and Atlanta—took root and continue to this day.

The Council was also the catalyst for the All Stars Project (ASP). Members of the Council repeatedly told our organizers that we should do something for their children who had nothing to do but hang out on the streets and get in trouble. So, we went to the young people and asked them what they wanted to do. They said they wanted to put on talent shows. This was the period of hip-hop's emergence, and youth in the Black and Latino communities were eager to showcase their break dancing, rapping and other performance skills. Our organizers and the young people (and some of the parents) worked together to produce a talent show in a church basement in the Bronx. We put on another, and another. The participants were receiving positive feedback from their families and neighbors, often for the first time. In addition to performing, the young people were soon producing, ushering, running the tech and organizing their friends and neighbors to attend. At each talent show, participants were told from the stage, "If you can perform on stage, you can perform in life."

The ASP has grown into a national leader in afterschool. The organization reaches approximately 20,000 young people through its locations in New York City, Newark Jersey City, Chicago, the San Francisco Bay Area and Dallas. Groups inspired by the All Stars model are active in Atlanta, London, Tokyo and Uganda. In addition to the Talent Show Network, the All Stars Project currently sponsors three other after school development programs for youth—the Development School for Youth, Youth Onstage! and Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids—as well as a free university-like school, UX, attended primarily by working class adults.

The methodology informing All Stars is performatory in the social therapeutic sense—the focus on development, the use of group building to create an environment of cooperation, the developmental value of play and performance to create new possibilities, new meanings, new versions of oneself and new relationships. Additionally, as an independently funded non-profit organization, the All Stars was built by volunteers and is financially supported by individuals, many of whom are also actively involved as volunteers. In bringing inner city youth together with business and cultural leaders, academics, police officers and other caring adults, the All Stars creates dozens of overlapping zpds where everyone grows. This methodology shifts the focus from cognition (for example, people who are different from each other need to be taught to be tolerant, remediation is needed to develop skills in people who lack them) to the collaborative *activity* of creating something new together, whether it be a new relationship between rich and poor, an understanding of mental illness, how to listen to others, or what to do when you want to fight.

The entry of theatre into our community also played a catalytic role in broadening social therapy into social therapeutics. The Castillo Theatre (originally named the Otto Rene Castillo Center for Working Class Culture) was founded in 1983 by a handful of performing and fine artists active with our organizing projects who wanted to contribute more by starting a cultural center. Over the years the Castillo Theatre has produced hundreds of mostly new socially and philosophically engaged plays. Its theatre productions were brought together with the people and ideas of organizations of the development community, like the All Stars Project and the Institute. Given this context the Castillo Theatre quickly evolved into an activity/environment for the "mash-up" of social therapy and performance.

This mash-up was accelerated when, in 1986, Castillo's founders invited Newman to direct a play. He was 51 years old at the time and went on to write 44 plays and musicals, and direct more than that. (Newman wrote several "therapy plays" that featured Vygotsky, Wittgenstein, Freud, Marx, and postmodernists and modernists.) Under his leadership, Castillo created an improv troupe, that, under various names, continues to this day. Through our work in the theatre, Newman began to see social therapy groups in a new way—as pieces of theatre. The ensemble building necessary to put on a show shares

features with the social therapy group building its group. Meaning emerges in activity in both social therapy group talk and in creating a production, where script, characters, set, lighting, costumes, etc. come together to create the play.

Our experience creating theatre and bringing performance to inner city youth corroborated Newman's and my hunch that Vygotsky's insights about young children were applicable throughout the life span. The potential to perform "as if a head taller" is always there. On talent show stages and theatrical stages, young people and adults were performing other than who they were (made-up characters or different versions of themselves)—and developing in the process.

The Psychotherapy Establishment Closes Ranks and Social Therapy Opens its Arms

The following bits of history were in no way causally connected.

New York State was one of the last states in the US to require a license for those practicing psychotherapy. This allowed us, and so many other alternative practices, to not only see clients but to also provide training to those who showed promise, whether they were credentialed or not. We trained dozens of lay people from the mid-1970s through the 1990s, many of whom remain in practice to this day, and the development and expansion of social therapy across the US in the late 1980s and 1990s depended on it. But this changed with the turn of the century. In the name of professionalization, the therapy world became smaller overnight.

Between 2003-2005, legislation requiring the licensing of professionals who practice psychotherapy or counseling went into effect in New York State. What soon followed was further legislation restricting where practitioners who were eligible for licensing could accumulate supervised practice hours (Social Work Licensure, October 2008). The result was a narrowing of available psychotherapeutic and counseling approaches and limitations on the kinds of institutions practitioners could be exposed to during their training and early years of practice. This, in turn, resulted in reducing the number of treatment options—as well as understandings of emotional distress—available to the public. Credentialed professional available to people seeking help in clinics, schools, and community centers were restricted in what type of therapy they could offer,

and aspiring practitioners fresh out of school were exposed to fewer and fewer approaches.

This legislation severely limited who the Institute could train to people who were already credentialed and eligible for licensing as social workers, mental health counselors, psychologists, etc. Further, we were not willing to change how we worked so as to meet the requirements (specific diagnoses and types of session records) for being a placement for professionals to get "their hours." Consequently, the numbers in our two-year Therapist Training Program dwindled to 1-2 every few years.

At the same time, awareness of and interest in social therapeutic methodology, our conceptualization of play and performance, "our Vygotsky" and our Wittgenstein-Vygotsky synthesis was growing. It was becoming known internationally and within various scholarly traditions as a method of social engagement and transformation. Face to face and Internet connections with people developing or searching for new ways to build community, heal trauma, engage the devastation of poverty, transform the learning model, etc., blossomed. Also growing was what we would come to call the emergence of the performance movement. We discovered that an increasing number of people world- wide were experimenting with the creative arts and performance approaches to psychological and social issues. Among scholars, colleagues of ours were also coming to appreciate the potential of performance, including Ken and Mary Gergen and Sheila MacNamee. Through a series of conversations in 2000 and 2001, we decided to host a conference on performance together. We called it Performing the World (PTW). 120 people from 14 countries came together in October 2001for this three-day experiment in performing a conference. Since then, the Institute has hosted nine more PTWs (since 2008, in partnership with the All Stars Project), each with 300-500 participants from dozens of countries (Friedman and Holzman, 2014). The international interest in social therapeutics, as well as the 2001 PTW, showed us that there was a critical mass that wanted us to find a way for them to train with us. We responded, and two years later in 2003, the Institute launched The International Class, a ten-month course of study in social therapeutics. The International Class combines virtual study and conversation with three immersive residencies at the Institute. In 2019 we graduated our fifteenth cohort.

As of this date, there are 143 alumni from 30 countries. They come from psychology, education, social work, theatre, dance, music, creative arts therapies, counseling, medicine, humanitarian aid, and community organizing. Some have established positions at NGOs or in universities. Others are grassroots community workers. Some have explored the use of play, improvisation, performance, theater, or other creative arts and storytelling in their work. Others have not. A few are familiar with Marx, Vygotsky and/or Wittgenstein. Most are not. Some are pioneers and innovators. Others are radicals in spirit and impassioned about bringing about profound social change All are committed to empowering individuals and communities, whether they are involved with refugees, marginalized communities, homeless and poor youth, prisoners, or educational, therapeutic, rehabilitation or educational institutions.

With The International Class, social therapeutics has become global. While all of our graduates have taken something of social therapeutic methodology into their lives and work, some of them, inspired by our development community, are building performatory social therapeutic organizations and development communities. These include five graduates living on the Mexico-US border in El Paso and Cuidad Juarez. Their organization, Performing Communities de Esperanza, is a binational, bilingual, and multicultural community coalition that promotes human development through play, performance and social therapeutics. Another example is two graduates, one from Greece and the other from Denmark, who have brought PTW to Europe with their bi-annual Play, Perform, Learn, Grow conference. Their founding conference in 2018 had a particular focus on the challenge Europe faces, as millions of refugees and immigrants arrive to its shores.

About ten years into Performing the World and The International Class, after experiencing their steady growth, we realized that social therapeutics was becoming a methodology for a new kind of social activism—performance activism—which is neither resistance nor reaction, not a negation of what is, but a positive becoming of what can be. Since the first social therapy group was held over four decades ago, social therapy has changed and yet remains the same. It is still practiced as a therapy and at the same time it has broadened into social therapeutics and performance activism. Through all of its changes occurring in the midst of the world's changes, its reason for being—living under

capitalism makes people emotionally sick—and its goal— engaging the subjectivity of community organizing and the mass psychology of contemporary capitalism—have gotten stronger.

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