

Laing, Cooper and the Tension in Theory and Therapy

by Russell Jacoby

The inflation which is endemic to late capitalism does not exempt concepts and theories; if inflated money seeks to overcome the falling rate of profit, inflated concepts seek to overcome the falling rate of intelligence. Within left and radical thought this assumes a particular form: an increase in revolutionary face value. Today every theory is more revolutionary than the previous one, or so it claims. Such an increase is a response to a depreciation, as it were, in the critical substance and categories of the theories; as silver coins are now fabricated with copper, revolutionary theories are constructed with conformist and establishment concepts. The result is inflation. It if need be said, this development is not due to the cynicism of revolutionary thinkers, but the realities of bourgeois civilization.

R.D. Laing and David Cooper have not escaped this fate; their thought genuinely rings of political radicalism and revolutionary elan—and it drivels out into pop existentialism, positivism and mysticism. To the point that neither they nor their admirers seem to notice, it might not seem to matter. Yet it does matter; the radical critique of society is degraded into externals, against the inner drift of their own work. Over time this inner logic takes its toll, on Laing and Cooper, and their followers. The critique unable to sustain itself and hollowed of meaning, fronts for political passivity, establishment psychology, spiritualism, and so on.

The following thoughts intend neither to sum-up or write-off Laing and Cooper, but hope only to be suggestive. Their work itself is unfinished, and it is uncertain how they are to resolve the antinomies in which their thought is caught. Insofar as their work is incomplete so too are these remarks. In the following the term neo-Freudians refers to those such as Erich Fromm and Karen Horney who espoused a 'cultural' critique of Freud but retained in very diluted form Freudian concepts; the term post-Freudian is more inclusive—and inexact—incorporating those who outside of a Freudian framework, continue to reject—from various vantage points—behavioral psychology, e.g., Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, etc. They have built on a the work of the neo-Freudians, and in many ways share its logic and approach.

I

From the first, Laing and Cooper have repudiated the regressive principle of the post-Freudians—that of the discontinuum between health and sickness—and in doing so have returned to a Freudian position: the essential unity of psychic phenomena. Yet, this must be immediately

qualified; in their most recent writings the disunity has been maintained in the reverse: the mad are sane and both are located in distinct camps. This in turn reformulates in the reverse the bad identity of therapy and theory that is the mark of the post-Freudians. The latter naively identify individual and group therapy with social change. Laing and Cooper, on the other hand, openly in opposition to society, in flipping over the conventional designations of health and abnormality, reproduce as a mirror image the same identification of therapy and social change. They tend to equate individual psychoses and madness with social liberation; they invest in the former what can only be reached by the latter. Hence the noticeable glorification of schizophrenia, especially in *Politics of Experience*, as a "natural healing process," and "existential rebirth."

Laing and Cooper succumb to unresolved and unconscious contradictions which they do not, like Freud, articulate;¹ rather, in presenting them as transcended they fall prey to them. We are told that schizophrenia is a "special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation."² Yet, the content of this unlivable reality is whittled down to that of interpersonal relations, especially the family; this was precisely the drift of the neo-Freudians; the social structure was adulterated to social friendship patterns. "There are no schizophrenics," Cooper tells us; and further, the conventional method of "abstraction" in which the schizophrenic is considered removed "from the system of relationships in which he is caught" distorts the problem.³

While there are enough statements designating the family as a mediating agency between society and the individual, in the main it is accepted as the cause of social oppression, and not also its victim. The critique of the process of abstraction—considering the schizophrenic in isolation—issues into another abstraction: the family as an insular group. What Marcuse wrote of therapy among the neo-Freudians can be reformulated for this context. That the family is abstracted from society in the name of therapy aimed at a schizophrenic embedded in the family is not questioned; this is a pragmatic decision to be discussed between specialists, i.e., when or where individual or family therapy is more productive. What is questioned is when this procedure of abstraction is promptly forgotten, and the family is considered society, and not also its damaged product. When family therapy is billed as social change the imperatives for social change itself disappear.

An either-or is posed here which Laing and Cooper—and "radical" therapists—shy away from, but which is not arbitrary; rather it is rooted in the social structure. The social and radical analysis suggests that the

1. I am in essential but not complete agreement with J.B. Gorden, "The Meta-Journey of R.D. Laing," in *R.D. Laing and Anti-Psychiatry*, ed. R. Boyers (New York, 1971).

2. R.D. Laing, *Politics of Experience* (London, 1969), p. 95.

3. D. Cooper, *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry* (New York, 1971), p. 35.

individual designated mentally ill is ill not from personal defects; rather, the illness is a response to an "unlivable situation" that can be traced through the mediation of friends, family, jobs, and so on, to society. When loyal to this analysis, there can be no talk of therapy. More precisely: there can be talk of therapy, but therapy as therapy—not as radical therapy or social change. The therapy accepts for the sake of the individual victim the disjuncture between the *individual form* of the illness and its *social origin*. In this way therapy becomes self-conscious, adequate to its own notion; it does not mystify itself as radical cure or liberation while it responds to the emergency of the individual victim.

But one need not be loyal to the political and social analysis; it can be dropped for one that confuses interpersonal, family, and social analysis. Out of the confusion emerge possibilities of therapy as 'birth,' 'healing,' 'growth' that society precludes—if society were remembered. Rather it is forgotten by way of existential jargon or it is spiritualized away by a new religious ethos. The former participates in all the difficulties of theoryless and existential psychology. With Cooper, especially in *The Death of the Family*, a radical, individual, existential standpoint coexists with an equally radical communal one. Commitment to oneself is as evenly accentuated as commitment to the community; yet it is the very source of the evil that in bourgeois society the necessities of the individual and those of the collectivity diverge. To attain their identity in a free society presupposes the enunciation of their present antagonism. Cooper, however, unconscious of the contradiction, perpetuates it.

To follow him, insofar as the family violated the integrity of the individual, the duty of the individual is first toward him/her self. "The only way to compassionate involvement with others is the short cut of one's own liberation," Cooper writes, as if this were not the very jingle that bourgeois society monotonously plays.⁴ The short cut of individual liberation cuts short the social liberation without which the individual is shunted into a dead-end street. Early in the book Cooper tells an 'existential' tale of a Japanese poet who chooses to pass by a small desolate abandoned child because responsibility toward himself and his journey is of greater importance. The moral of this tale? "The hardest lesson of all is to know what one has to do for oneself."⁵ Such is the blank existentialism that fantasizes it is negating bourgeois society even as it heeds its first precept: to abandon the abandoned in the name of self-help first. Yet this is not the whole of Cooper; existential individualism vies with a communal and collective ethos. The contradiction is not merely Cooper's; it is one of an unfree society. Yet the point is not to lose it in the flurry, but to find it and say it. To pretend that one is the other is to promote the myth that personal

4. D. Cooper, *Death of the Family* (New York, 1971), p. 60.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

liberation is either personal or liberation. The only "short cut" is via the detour of social and political praxis.

II

The thought of Laing and Cooper is nourished by various intellectual traditions of which two stand out: (1) a neo-positivist social psychology and sociology focused on the group and group dynamics and (2) a European philosophical existentialism centered on the concrete existing individual. While these two traditions may seem incompatible they converge in a single concern: the individual and his/her immediate context. In different language—"interpersonal perception," "intersubjectivity"—both traditions repudiate the study of the individual abstracted from the context of other human beings; both stress the network of concrete human relations. Both, however, ultimately work to eat away the social context of these human relations; they reduce social relations to immediate human ones.

The study of group dynamics within sociology or psychology is hardly new; it derives from an American as well as a German tradition, from Charles H. Cooley as well as Georg Simmel and Kurt Lewin. Sociology itself has often been defined as the study of how social groups influence each other and their members. The attraction of this approach for establishment sociology is not difficult to discern; as Adorno and Horkheimer comment, the concept of society disappears to make way for endless empirical observations on group dynamics.⁶ These empirical observations skirt the antagonistic relationship that is outside the laboratory—the individual and society—in favor of the safe, sound and verifiable one of individual and individual.

6. "The investigation of the relationship of the individual and society is reduced to the level of the study of the dependence of the individual and group," T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, Institut für Sozialforschung, in *Soziologische Exkurse* (Frankfurt, 1956), p. 55. The diversity of the group dynamic tradition can be glimpsed in one of its advocates, Kurt Lewin; evident in his writings is an existential moment, protesting against a narrow behaviorism which abstracts the individual from a human context: "One of the basic characteristics of field theory in psychology . . . is the demand that the field that influences the individual should be described not in 'objective physicalistic' terms, but in the way in which it exists for that person at that time." But as with Laing and Cooper this in no way precludes the mathematization or formalization of this context: ". . . it is possible to determine and to measure psychological atmospheres quite accurately." K. Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science*, ed. D. Cartwright (New York, 1951, 1964), pp. 62-63. Also Lewin was an initiator and organizer of the first T-groups and sensitivity training; see A. Marrow, *The Practical Theorist: The Life and Work of Kurt Lewin* (New York, 1969), pp. 210 f. Finally it could be noted that Lewin was a life-long friend of Karl Korsch—which perhaps explains or is explained by the positivist bent in Korsch's own thought; Lewin wrote a pamphlet in 1920 on Taylorism in a series edited by Korsch on "Practical Socialism." They also collaborated on a paper in 1939 on "Mathematical Constructs in Psychology and Sociology." Cf. Paul Breines, "Lukács and Korsch. 1910-1932" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Madison, Wisconsin, 1972), p. 226.

With Laing and Cooper the group dynamic approach is extended to the study of schizophrenia. The promise is to understand schizophrenia by situating it in its immediate human context, usually the family. "Our interest," writes Laing (with Aaron Esterson), "is in persons always in relation with us, or with each other, and always in the light of their group context, which in this work is primarily the family, but may include also the extra-familial personal network of a family. . . ." This method seeks to study "at one and the same time i) each person in the family; ii) the relations between persons in the family; iii) the family itself as a system."⁷ The claim is that the "shift of view" from considering schizophrenia abstracted from a context to situating it within the family "*has an historical significance no less radical than the shift from a demonological to a clinical viewpoint three hundred years ago.*"⁸

The rub is that from the standpoint of theory, society is shuffled-out; the shift of viewpoints issues into the very problematic of the study of group dynamics in general: a social constellation is banalized to an immediate human network. It forgets that the relationship between "you and me" or "you and the family" is not exhausted in the immediate: all of society seeps in. If it is clear that the immediate relationship of boss and worker, teacher and student is grounded in a non-immediate social configuration, it is no less true of family relationships. Society as the determining structure dictates more than the husk of a relationship; it cuts into the living germ. Laing and Cooper are aware of this—but only aware; the awareness is not translated into theory, but remains on the level of continual observation.

The contradiction that inheres in all therapy turns into an antinomy. If the family is the immediate context of schizophrenia, it is not *the* context: society. Inasmuch as the limitations of family therapy are not acknowledged the therapy begins to confuse itself with social change. Yet the very material itself, the case histories presented, show to what degree the family, if it is the immediate situation for schizophrenia, is only part of the whole situation. The question which is implicitly posed by the family analysis of the child schizophrenic is the origin of the parents that 'caused' the schizophrenia. Evidently they emerged from other families, themselves caught in other networks, and so on: society enters by the back door. The family analysis pushes towards its limits; the facts discovered during the analysis, in suggesting that the family itself is victimized confesses that family therapy is insufficient. "Neither of Lucie's parents had emerged from their relations with their parents as persons in their own right. Both had been hopelessly immersed all their lives in phantasy unrecognized as such."⁹ Or:

7. R.D. Laing, A. Esterson, *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (New York, 1964), pp. 7, 9.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 13. Emphasis in the original; or less flamboyantly: "The most significant theoretical and methodological development in psychiatry of the last two decades is, in my view, the growing dissatisfaction with any theory or study of the individual which isolates him from his context." Laing, *Self and Others* (New York, 1961, 1969, 2nd revised edition), p. 65.

9. *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, p. 59.

"Mrs. Church herself had been subject to her own four hundred blows, leaving her, as one report put it, an empty shell. Understandably, and indeed necessarily, Mrs. Church tended to destroy not only her own inner world but Claire's..."¹⁰ The "and indeed necessarily" captures the whole dynamic of society.

The problem is not that family analysis and therapy is being used; it is that therapy does not attain self-consciousness: lucidity as to its scope. Because the tension between family and society, theory and therapy dissipate, social theory and change is absorbed by family therapy. The unadmitted tension between the theory and therapy takes its revenge: the therapy conceiving itself as dealing with the real context inches out to include more and more people in this context, and finally is damned to impotence, confronted by more people than any therapy could hope to 'treat.' Because the disjuncture between society and family is neglected, the specific praxis suitable for each is rendered an amalgam suitable for neither. Laing cites with approval the therapeutic approach of a doctor whose "strategy was to reconvene the network out of which mother had dropped in the past 20 years, eventually bringing together at one meeting upwards of 35 people, representing elements of no less than seven nuclear families. He did not 'treat' the son or the mother individually, or as a dyad, but 'treated' the whole network."¹¹

The absurdity of this approach is based on the illusion that the therapist can "reconvene" the whole network of which the patient is a part, and secondly, even if it could be done, that these numbers of people could be 'treated.' The question, of course, is why stop with 35 people, since they are evidently involved with another 70 and so on. The implicit logic suggests the project of gathering all the members of society in one room, as if the antagonisms could be ironed out in the give and take of a group discussion. Objective conditions are refined into bad vibes. At times Laing has suggested that the entire world is an expanded family group, what he calls a "Total World System."¹² Truths adequate for family therapy degenerate into naive political pronouncements on "East" "West" relations passed-off as a family tiff. If there is a recognition of a distinction between family and society, the distinction is reduced to one of complexity not of kind or structure. "New elements" and a "new gestalt" do enter into the "larger pattern;" with that provision "it seems that our scheme of the *dyadic spiral* for the interplay of true perspectives has relevance in the international sphere." The relevance is shown on the advise as to how to avoid an "East-West" conflagration: "...If West thinks East thinks that West thinks that East thinks West is going to move first, then West..." etc. etc.¹³

10. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

11. Laing, *The Politics of the Family* (New York, 1969, 1971), p. 49.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

13. Laing, H. Phillipson, A.R. Lee, *Interpersonal Perception* (New York, 1966, 1972), p. 172.

Forgotten is that society is not identical to a family, nor social relations to human relations; capitalism is not merely numbers of people involved in groups and families. A collaborator of Laing, Esterson, sums up the humanist reductionist principle: "A social system is simply the pattern of interaction and interexperience of the persons comprising it."¹⁴ This is inexact: it is also a social construction and constriction which, if it is derived from human labor and activity, in turn dominates them; it is objective as well as subjective. A radical analysis of schizophrenia is committed to society as the determinant; evidently the mediations are crucial, and the family is one of them. But they are mediations, not origins; the family does not exist in a no-man's land. It itself is snared in a historical dynamic; it has changed in the past and it is changing now. It is as much victim as victimizer.

Again the point is not to renounce family therapy or group therapy; it is to realize to what extent even the most extended therapy remains therapy: a choice in how to treat the individual that leaves untouched the social roots. In that sense there is no such activity as radical therapy—there is only therapy and radical politics. Need it be said? There is no shame in aiding the victims, the sick, the damaged, the down-and-out. Mental illness and treatment is class illness and treatment.¹⁵ There is much to be done within this reality; but the reformation of the social reality is another project, which if it is not utterly distinct from therapy, is not to be confused with it.

The question of the use of a medical or biological analogy in psychology can serve as a final clarification of the theory-therapy dialectic. Laing and Cooper, like many others, protest the use of such a model because it mystifies the social and human processes within psychology that are non-existent in non-psychological medicine. The very "diagnosis" or "definitions" in psychology enter into the dynamic of the situation differently than strict medical terms; for example, a medical diagnosis of tuberculosis, even an incorrect one, does not affect the disease, while one of "schizophrenia" may 'cause' schizophrenia.¹⁶ The definitions, the doctor, the immediate human context specify the milieu of psychology differently than in non-psychological medicine.

This is undoubtedly true—but insufficient. The critique of a quasi-biological psychology in the name of society forgets that biological medicine is not outside the social dynamic; clarity here could illuminate the theory-therapy relation that exists in *both* spheres: psychological and non-psychological. The biological model contains a truth if it is freed from the mystification that removes it from history and society. The critique of the biological model lags behind a vast amount of critical literature that shows

14. A. Esterson, *The Leaves of Spring: Schizophrenia, Family and Sacrifice* (Pelican, 1972), p. 243.

15. A. Hollingshead, F.C. Redlich, *Social Class and Mental Illness* (New York, 1958, 1967).

16. *The Politics of the Family*, pp. 41-42.

that not only medical care, but medical and 'biological' diseases and disorders themselves are subject to a social dynamic of class, stratification and so on.¹⁷ If this be so, the theory-therapy dialectic can be pursued as it is valid in both dimensions, without, however, losing all distinction between the psychological and the non-psychological. Each dimension possesses a specific as well as a shared relationship to society.

The question of the social manufacture and perception of automobile accidents can be considered in this context; accidents are more than accidents; from the vast numbers of accidents 'on the job' to occupational diseases they are embedded in a social configuration.¹⁸ So too with most diseases and sicknesses, from colds to infantile mortality to malaria. None of these are randomly distributed in populations; they possess a social content. Chronic disease, for instance, is not a biological statement about the poor, it is a social statement.¹⁹ The fact, however, of the social origin does not preclude their treatment on an individual basis. The reverse is true: treatment on an individual basis must proceed at the same time that the theory suggests that the 'ailment' and ultimately the 'cure' is extra-individual. The victim of an automobile accident is not to be turned away by the politically aware doctor with the remark that he or she is not a victim of a specific car and accident but a victim of an obsolete transportation system kept alive by the necessities of profit. Both are true, and both are to be preserved in contradiction; the emergency of the individual is to be attended to even as it is traced to non-individual and social factors which are the real source.

The situation of the doctor 'treating' schizophrenia is in principle not dissimilar from one treating black-lung diseases or automobile 'accidents.' While there is neither identity nor complete separation between the psychic and somatic, the disjuncture of theory and therapy is valid in both; the therapy in each leaves untouched the social roots—which does not mean that the therapy is unnecessary. The damage from 'accidents,' psychic and physical, needs to be healed; the battered driver is to be cured so as to return to the expressways, this time to die. Psychic transfusions are to be given to the schizophrenic so he or she can be released into the madhouse called society. This contradiction is contained in therapy of each kind; it is to be elucidated, not veiled, as if some new treatment, be it for broken bones or broken souls, can magically escape from it. What Laing and Cooper tend to forget is that if family, extra-family therapy is progress over

17. For a recent bibliography of this material see *The Politics of Health Care*, ed. K. Rosenberg, G. Schiff, Boston Medical Committee for Human Rights (New England Free Press: Boston).

18. For a survey of occupational accidents and diseases see F. Wallick, *The American Worker: An Endangered Species* (New York, 1972).

19. See R. Hurly, "The Health Crisis of the Poor," and in the same volume, C.C. Hughes and J.M. Hunter, "Disease and 'Development' in Africa," in *Social Organization of Health*, ed. H.P. Dreitzel (New York, 1971).

clinical therapy and analysis, this is progress in therapy, not social theory or praxis.

III

The concentration on the family nexus that Laing and Cooper advocate entails a concentration in the dimension in which this operates: the present communicative interaction of the family. The analysis proceeds on the plane of communication and the break-down of communication, meta-communication and lack of communication—"spirals" of misunderstanding. The analysis uses terms such as expectation, validation, confirmation, perception, and so on—terms which suggest communication in its verbal and non-verbal meaning.

The drift of the analysis is not distinct from that of the neo- and post-Freudians; it leaves the psychic depths and past for the present and accessible inter-human dynamics. The same critique of psychoanalysis is advanced: psychoanalysis leaves out the social. "Psychoanalytic theory has no construct for the dyad as such, nor indeed for any social system generated by more than one person at a time. Psychoanalytic theory has, therefore, no way of placing the single person in any social context."²⁰ As with past Freud critiques of the neo-Freudians, the "social" that is then added is simultaneously flattened-out, this time to communication.

The weaknesses of the communicative and interaction formulations are the weaknesses of common sense psychology; it is not that they are untrue, but superficial; and they become the more untrue the more the surface analysis drives out the past and psychic dimensions. Increasingly this seems to happen; the family appears more and more as a power group, and schizophrenia simply a product of mismatched roles, expectations, messages, and so on. The family "invents" schizophrenia; or "schizophrenic symptoms are virtually whatever makes the family unbearably anxious about the tentatively independent behavior of one of its offspring."²¹ Or schizophrenia is considered the product of preconceptions and expectations: hence Laing suggests that an experiment in which a group of 'schizophrenics' would be treated as sane and a group of 'normals' treated as schizophrenic would show that expectation 'causes' the disease.²²

If in Freud neuroses and psychoses are rooted in an erotic and infantile past, and hence are completely or only partially eradicable, here they are dependent on the flow of communication. The communication models implicitly accept a parliamentary notion of reality where there are no real antagonisms; in the official accounts all conflict and differences are traced

20. *Interpersonal Perception*, p. 8. Cf. D. Cooper, "Freud Revisited," *New Left Review*, 20 (Summer, 1963), pp. 112 f.

21. D. Cooper, *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry*, p. 19.

22. *The Politics of the Family*, p. 46.

to break-downs in communication, as if real contradictions did not exist. The same notion is stated or implied by much of the communication theory of psychoses; repression and antagonism are sublimated to mixed and confused messages. Hence in Gregory Bateson, who pioneered this approach—and on whom Laing and Cooper draw—the ego-function is described as “the process of discriminating communicational modes. . .” In schizophrenia “we must not look for some specific traumatic experience in the infantile etiology. . . The specificity for which we search is to be on an abstract or formal level.”²³

Again: the point is not that these formulations are inaccurate; but that they are superficial. If within therapy a communicative approach is effective, this is not questioned. What is questioned is when an effective approach within the treatment makes claims to be more than a description of current processes. A break-down of communication is more than a break-down of communication; it is rooted in other tensions and antagonisms. Communication is a moment of existence, not the whole of it.

The confusion between the surface and the essence lead Laing and Cooper to make the primal bourgeois error: they mistake the phenomenon specific to one historical era as universal and invariant. In brief they take the human relations that prevail in late bourgeois society as human relations as such; role behavior is passed off as human behavior and not a degraded form of it. What Laing and Cooper barely broach is that the inter-personal relations that proceed exclusively in the track of images, confirmations, meta-confirmations, and so on, are already an alienated mode of behavior;²⁴ it is the behavior and communication of the disintegrating ego.

When Laing writes that “human beings are constantly thinking about others and about what others are thinking about them, and what others think they are thinking about others, and so on,”²⁵ he neglects to add the crucial qualification: not all human beings but human beings who have been mesmerized and mutilated. “Human beings” seek double and triple confirmation when the first fails; and the first fails when the ego that advances it fails. The ego, frightened over its own fragility, seeks endless confirmations it can neither give nor receive. The logic of human relations approaches the logic of paranoia; in every nook and cranny lurks danger. Confirmation hardly allays the fears; one needs meta-confirmation and meta-meta-confirmation. “What I think you think of me reverberates back

23. G. Bateson, “Towards a Theory of Schizophrenia,” in Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972), pp. 205, 206.

24. To be sure, the intent is exactly to undo the ‘knots’ or the spirals of mis-communication. “The patterns delineated here have not yet been classified by a Linnaeus of human bondage. . .” Laing, *Knots* (New York, 1970), p. i. But this intent is concerned with the failures of communication; it does not turn into a critique of this mode of communication in general.

25. *Interpersonal Perception*, p. 30.

to what I think of myself, and what I think of myself in turn affects the way I act towards you; this influences me and so on."²⁶ "And so on:" the task is endless, without escape or exit. In the prison of mirrors which is society the lifers stare at the mirrors for signs of life.²⁷ Multiple reflections are the opium for the multiple wounds the ego has suffered.

This is not to argue that in a future and human society confirmations and meta-confirmations would not exist; they undoubtedly would. But they become an exclusive pasttime in a society where the ego is on its way out. Total confirmation is an imperative where total insecurity is a reality. "Knots" becomes the norm of human discourse when the social noose is gagging the individual. This is the joyless reality—but it is also the facade: a facade because it is a reflection of an objective and social reality that is hidden from view. The theory of interpersonal perception is a theory of the spectacle.

The effortless shift in Laing and Cooper from a stress on the real and interpersonal context of human relations to a symbolization of this context, from an existential reality to a positivist one, which otherwise seems inexplicable, is due to the very confusion between appearance and essence. Laing and Cooper, like role psychologists, are trapped in the facade which can be adequately presented but not penetrated by positivist logic. The maps and schemes capture the movement of reality, but only once this reality itself has reduced men and women to carriers of signs and symbols. The maps of human relations that they plot are the reified expression of reification: " $p \rightarrow (o \rightarrow (p \rightarrow (o \rightarrow p)))$ " He thinks his wife thinks he supposes she loves him."²⁸ This is the loveless talk of a loveless reality.

The move from existentialism to positivism is eased by the facade which is simultaneously both: existential and positivist. What is meant by facade is not a phony front for the real thing, but a facade in that the social and objective factors are veiled. Exactly because the facade *is* the immediate reality of human relations in late bourgeois society, in exploring it one can claim that one is exploring the existential reality; and exactly because this existential reality is alienated and dehuman it can be adequately expressed in positivist schemes. Existentialism and positivism converge when the existential reality is a positivist one.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

27. "We have all noticed those people attracted to plate glass windows, transported by their own reflections in the glass. Caught by their own glance, they are compelled to see themselves in the way Others see them. A perpetual rhythm etched into the hardened surfaces of the urbanized world, reflecting the Image Crisis that affects all of those who must define themselves in relation to the Super-Alien Other. On all sides these mirrors beckon and insist." Maxy Beml, "William Burroughs and the Invisible Generation," *Telos*, 13 (Fall, 1972), p. 129.

28. Laing, *Self and Others*, p. 157.

IV

In existentialism Laing and Cooper find their philosophical roots. "It is to the existential tradition, however, that I acknowledge my main intellectual indebtedness."²⁹ Also to be recalled is that the least read book of Laing and Cooper is probably *Reason and Violence*, an exposition of Sartre. A discussion of this matter is here impossible; in general the Sartrean existentialism as filtered through Laing and Cooper does not correct its original weaknesses—some of which Marcuse has indicated.³⁰

One element of this existential tradition can clarify the subjective approach in Laing and Cooper that threatens to swallow the social and objective reality. Laing appeals to Feuerbach as the initiator of the existential discovery of the inter-personal reality. "Over a hundred years ago Feuerbach effected a pivotal step in philosophy. He discovered that philosophy had been exclusively oriented around 'I'. No one had realized that the 'you' is as primary as the I." "The presence of these others has a profound reactive effect on me. . . Philosophically, the meaninglessness of the category 'I' without its complementary category of 'you' first stated by Feuerbach, was developed by Martin Buber."³¹

Though anyone and everyone can and has been included in the grabbag of existentialism, the appeal to Feuerbach has its reason; but Laing and Cooper recapitulate not only the strengths of Feuerbach, but also his failings. His strength is that, against the idealism of Hegel a human and materialistic reality is advanced. "Again and again Feuerbach insists that the starting point of philosophy cannot be philosophy but the actual life of man. The primary fact in the life of man is. . . the existence of the human community."³² But in Feuerbach the same antinomies surface as with Laing, Cooper, and humanist psychologists: the human community shrinks to the immediacy of the I/You encounter, and this is abstracted from the historical and social reality. History in Feuerbach and Feuerbachians turns into anthropology, an invariant. "The essence of man," wrote Feuerbach, "is contained only in the community and unity of man with man; it is a unity, however, which rests only in the reality of the distinction between I and thou." Or he wrote, "the true dialectic" is a "dialogue between I and thou."³³

29. Laing, *The Divided Self* (Baltimore, Md., 1959, 1965), p. 10.

30. For a Marcusean critique of Sartre, see R. Aronson, "The Roots of Sartre's Thought," *Telos*, 13 (Fall, 1972), pp. 47-67; and for a somewhat different presentation of the existential moment in Laing, see C. Ratner, "Principles of Dialectical Psychology," *Telos*, 9 (Fall, 1971), esp. pp. 98-103.

31. *Interpersonal Perception*, pp. 3, 4. For a history of the I/thou concept, see the first part of J. Cullberg, *Das Du und die Wirklichkeit. Zum ontologischen Hintergrund der Gemeinschaftskategorie*, in *Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift*, I (1933), Uppsala, Sweden.

32. S. Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1936, 1962), p. 258.

33. L. Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, ed. M.H. Vogel (New York, 1966), pp. 71-72.

It is to be recalled that Marx and Engels took Feuerbach to task exactly for the reduction of a social reality to a timeless human encounter. Engels in a fragment ridiculed Feuerbach's I/thou formulation. "Philosophy has reached a point where the trivial fact of the inevitability of intercourse between human beings—a fact without knowledge of which the second generation that ever existed would not have been produced, a fact already involved in the sexual difference—is presented by philosophy at the end of its entire development as the greatest result. And presented, moreover, in the mysterious form of the 'unity of I and you'."³⁴ Or as Marx and Engels wrote in *The German Ideology*, Feuerbach "conceives of men not in the given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them what they are, he never arrived at the really existing men, but stops at the abstraction 'man'."³⁵ He leaves out the "ensemble of the social relations."³⁶

To be more exact: what is lacking in Feuerbach is what is lacking in Laing and Cooper; according to Marx and Engels this is the conception of man as activity, as praxis. It is precisely for this reason that Marx, to follow Marcuse, "reaches back beyond Feuerbach to Hegel."³⁷ For Hegel the concept of labor is the irreplaceable element of human history. Here labor does not merely mean factory work; it means the life praxis of man—objectification in the social world. Labor is the specific mode of activity for human existence; alienated labor is one form of labor, not labor itself.³⁸

Because objectification or praxis is lacking in Feuerbach, his theory for all its humanism, its I/thou, is a passive one; it does not comprehend the world as a social environment, the congealed product of human praxis. This failure Laing and Cooper share with Feuerbach; they succumb to the spectacle: the non-activity of watching and viewing and being watched. What Marcuse wrote of Feuerbach could be written of Laing and Cooper. "In Feuerbach man's possession of, and relation to, the world remains essentially theoretical, and this is expressed in the fact that the way of relating. . . is 'perception.' In Marx, to put it briefly, labour replaces this perception, although the central importance of the theoretical relationship does not disappear; it is combined with labour in a relationship of dialectical interpenetration."³⁹

The logic of Laing and Cooper's approach to human relations is

34. The fragment is found in the appendix to Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow, 1964), p. 660.

35. *The German Ideology*, p. 58.

36. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," VI.

37. H. Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," in Marcuse, *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (London, 1972), p. 21.

38. For a discussion of the concept of labor, see Marcuse, "Ueber die philosophischen Grundlagen des wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Arbeitsbegriff," in Marcuse, *Kultur und Gesellschaft II* (Frankfurt, 1965). An English translation is now in *Telos*, 16 (Summer, 1973).

39. Marcuse, "The Foundation of Historical Materialism," p. 22.

Feuerbachian; inter-personal perceptions, images, expectations become fundamental determining structures, and not secondary ones. In Laing and Cooper they dislodge the basic mode of appropriation of the world, human praxis. "Self-identity," writes Laing, "is constituted not only by our looking at ourselves, but also by our looking at others looking at us. At this more complex, more concrete level, self-identity is a synthesis of my looking at me with my view of others view of me."⁴⁰ This is the theory of the spectacle; the passivity of the consumer is elevated into a theory of human identity.⁴¹ Because the means of production and reproduction of life answer to capital and profit, life itself seeks refuge in non-activity; human praxis in this world contracts to you-watching me-watching you-watching me. Passive watching is the sanctioned form of relief in a society that has squeezed out the only relief: active human experience. The peep show is no longer the side show but with audience participation is society. Laing and Cooper work this up into a theory of human—not inhuman—relations.

Finally: as existence turns into positivism, the reign of things over life, non-dialectical logic knows only one escape: mysticism, spiritualism, and the like. This is an emphatic note in Laing and Cooper; today it is part of the Zeitgeist. The prevailing reason and reality are confused with reason itself, and it is supposed that the non-rational is an alternative outside reality and not further in it.

The assumptions that mystification is a response to alienation, 'inner' space to the lack of 'outer' space, was suspect long ago, and has gained nothing in the interim.

The key to the logic is crystallized in the debate between Marcuse and N.O. Brown about the latter's *Love's Body*. Brown wrote in a rebuttal to Marcuse's review, "the alternative to reification is mystification."⁴² This is the crux of the matter. To critical theory mystification is the complement to reification, not its dissolution. It seeks to trick away reification by using reification's own tricks: to make things dance before the eyes while bourgeois society limps along. If "our time has been distinguished" by an almost total forgetfulness of the internal world, to follow Laing, it is not to be called to life by forgetting the outer world that forgot the inner one. The promise of the "universal unleashing of a full spirituality" (Cooper) will turn into a universally controlled and programmed reality if it is not translated into social praxis. "Occultism," wrote Adorno, "is the complement of reification. When the objective world appears to the living as blinder than ever before they attempt to find meaning in it by abracadabra."⁴³

40. *Interpersonal Perception*, p. 6.

41. "The spectacle within society corresponds to the concrete manufacture of alienation," Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, 1970), p. 30.

42. N.O. Brown, "A Reply to Herbert Marcuse," in Marcuse, *Negations* (Boston, 1968), p. 244.

43. T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt, 1951, 1964), p. 323.

Today half-serious mystics vie with totally serious ones; stars, signs, gurus interpret a world of capitalist hieroglyphics. The messages from the stars inadvertently tell the truth: the daily fate and plight is irrational—it is in the stars;⁴⁴ hence it soothes those who suspect that life is as predetermined as it actually is by shifting the blame from the social to natural and supernatural reality. But today the cults are not only a response to a cold and bleak society, but to a left that promised too much too fast. Those who banked everything on a revolution now or in six months were left with nothing when the time schedule changed. A 'law' to be formulated? Mystical politics produces mysticism without politics. The very recent interviews with Laing suggest this progression.

Not to be forgotten is the strength of the writing of Laing and Cooper; in a period when reason is mad, madness has its reason. Laing, Cooper, and their collaborators have emphasized this insight. But, as it has been argued here, this has more and more eroded into a parenthesis in a text of pop existentialism, positivism, and spiritualism. The text itself loses the tension between theory and therapy, and advances notions of human identity and relations that take the mutilated wrecks that people the social landscape as specimens of a future humanity. Endless talk on I and thou forgets that neither can be created out of endless talk. The writings of Laing and Cooper more and more suggest the confusion of psychic first aid with liberation.

44. See Adorno's "The Stars Down to Earth: The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column," in *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien*, II (1957), pp. 19 ff.

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