

**PS3-- CLOE MADANES INTERVIEW, "THERAPY TODAY:
PROMOTING REBELLION OR A BRAVE NEW WORLD?", MAY
2000**

"The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're not afraid of death. And if anything should go wrong, there's soma. Which you go and chuck out the window in the name of liberty, Mr. Savage. Liberty!", he laughed. "My good boy!"

-- World Controller Mustapha Mond, Brave New World

"Salon: Would you go as far as to say that we're heading toward a Brave New World today? Cloe Madanes: Definitely."

-- from an interview at the "Evolution of Psychotherapy" conference, May 27, 2000"

Psychotherapist Cloe Madanes was worried. A well-known pioneer in the field of family therapy, she found that her African-American client continued to hint at suicide despite her best efforts. Finally, after a few sleepless nights, she decided on a bold strategy.

The next day she told him that she understood that he wanted to die. "After all", she said, "the world is full of injustice and life is meaningless." Many intelligent people have thought the same way, she continued, like Hemingway. Suicidal from a very young age, he went out and had adventures that most of us would never dream of because he was not afraid of dying.

Then she tried her bold stroke. "Go to Rwanda and help the Tutsis, especially the children, they really want to live," she urged. The man responded, "I could be killed!" She said, "Isn't that what you want? But you will save a few children before you go, and die a heroic death." Although the patient never went to Africa, he stopped hinting at suicide and focused on finding a wife and changing to a better job. By putting him to the test, she says, she helped him find what really mattered to him at this point in his life. "I would have been equally

happy for him if he had actually gone to Africa. The point is finding what is important to you," she explains now.

This case is a dramatic example of Madanes's "Social Action Therapy", detailed in her 1996 book, The Violence of Men. Challenging today's therapy on a far deeper level than the usual critiques of managed care and anti-depressants, she argues that therapists need to change their present near-exclusive focus on clients' internal feeling-states. You and I cannot be truly happy, she believes, unless we form meaningful relationships and seek to heal social ills. And the profession should seek to transform society, not adjust individuals to it. Although she acknowledged it is considered heretical by today's standards, she says her approach harkens back to psychiatry's original challenge to the established order, as it supplanted traditional religions, brought sex out of the closet, undermined traditional authority of all kinds, and sought to reduce war, crime and violence.

It is no coincidence that Madanes, an effervescent, energetic woman whose talk is punctuated by an infectious laugh and frequent exclamation points, grew up in Argentina before coming to the United States in the mid-60s to study at U.C. Berkeley. She says young psychologists believed in democracy and helping the poor in Argentina, and that the military correctly understood therapy's inherent subversiveness. "They began by persecuting the group therapists," she explains. "Because if people talk about their discontent in a group, they then might want to do something about it. Then they also began persecuting therapists working with individuals."

And, she says, it made sense. "I just thought the military was stupid when I was young. But I now think they correctly understood that therapy is dangerous. And therapy has lost that today. We are not struggling with the deep issues of existence that so often have to do with social concerns."

Evidence of the underground support for her view of therapy as rebellion surfaced when Salon caught up with Madanes at the recent "Evolution of Psychotherapy" conference, a giant gathering that has been held once every 5 years since 1985 and is attended by over 5,000

therapists from around America. A charter member of the conference faculty and contemporary of such other conference "Masters" as Carl Rogers, Rollo May, Bruno Bethelheim, R.D. Laing, Virginia Satir and Victor Frankl, she received a surprising response to a passionate statement she read at a panel on ethics attended by well over 1,000 participants.

One could feel the room come alive as she departed from the deadening discussions of techniques and practicalities which had marked the conference till then. "Therapy fuels dissatisfaction by stirring up desires and the imagination. The Stalinists and the dictators understood the danger. Managed care and pharmaceutical companies are the modern Stalinists and right wing dictators who, in their aspirations to expand their markets, have created a powerful industry of mind control and are turning us into a nation of drug addicts. The very stuff of therapy - fantasy, dreams and memory - is dangerously close to coming massively under the control of large corporations."

And the atmosphere became electric when she issued her call to arms: "I propose that the right to therapy is a human right that we should defend without shame - it comes together with the right to our individual sovereignty, to preserve our own free space outside of the interference of others, to be truly in charge of our destiny. For this reason it is a permanent corroder of power structures that would like to see people satisfied, contented and controlled."

Thunderous applause greeted her statement, and it was clear that many in the room were moved by this appeal to their youthful idealism. It was also apparent, however, that they were not about to mount the barricades. Today's therapists do not tend to be social activists, and are preoccupied with the threat to their livelihoods from managed care reductions in the quantity and quality of the therapy they can offer.

Madanes, whose speech still retains the ironic and expressive flavor of her native Spanish tells a particularly revealing story about the difficulties that even an idealistic young therapist faces today.

One of her students consulted with her about a patient who had been labelled clinically depressed, put on medication, and convinced to enter a hospital because he had continued grieving about his father beyond the three months deemed appropriate by the profession. Madanes suggested to her student that she tell the patient that his depression was natural and that she should advise him to go home, go to work, and keep crying until he felt better.

Her student did so and was fired. "Can you imagine?," Madanes says bitterly today. "It's ridiculous to say that it's clinical depression if you grieve for a father longer than three months. They laugh at this viewpoint in other countries. Every culture and religion in the world knows that you grieve for at least a year!"

The story goes to the heart of the real issue facing therapy today: the degree to which, often unconsciously, it colludes in restricting people's growth and freedom. A parent's death can dramatically transform people's lives, as they individuate and face with their own mortality. Depression is not only natural, but can fuel major life-changes. By defining it as a medical problem, therapists are following a model far closer to the Huxley's dystopia than to psychology's original vision of growth and development.

The question of whether therapy will transform or maintain social norms is not a trivial one. With more than 300,000 therapists, 400 recognized schools of therapy, millions of clients, and massive influence television, movies, self-help groups and even organized religion, psychotherapy has clearly moved from an experiment to mainstream institution. President Clinton feels your pain, aspiring First Lady Tipper Gore vows to make mental health her number one priority, and Oprah rules on the wings of psychological self-help. The degree to which therapy does or does not promote social change in coming decades will have a major impact on America and the world.

At its best, Madanes argues, therapy can transform America not only by aiding the disturbed, but helping successful professionals and business people find meaning. "I do a jet-set therapy these days.

Unhappy baby-boomers invite me to their town to work intensively for two or three days to resolve money or family conflicts and to help them to find meaning in life. This kind of work can and should be therapy's greatest impact on society in coming years".

She was impressed by a meeting with the Dalai Lama in which he said that therapists are the the priests of the modern world. And, despite all, she remains optimistic. "I'm always very optimistic. To be a therapist you have to believe that everything changes all the time and all problems are solvable." She believes that over-use of drugs will end as the evidence mounts of their harmful effects, and that people will be willing to pay for their own therapy rather than be restricted by managed-care financing.

Those of us in less optimistic professions may not be as sanguine that Madanes's views will prevail. James Bugental for example, a highly-respected 85-year old therapist, told Salon that that he had prescribed medication for no more than 3% of his clients during a half-century of practice. Many therapists today, however, not only have more than 50% of their clients on anti-depressants but take them themselves. Madanes was only half-joking when she told the audience that she believed that half of them were probably on Prozac and the rest on Ritalin.

When even therapists themselves use chemicals to reduce their anxiety rather than promote change in themselves and society, it is difficult to see therapy as a source of rebellion. But it is only a few decades since it seemed impossible that the Berlin Wall would fall, apartheid would be dismantled or the nuclear energy industry could be derailed. Heretics like Cloe Madanes are not always burned at the stake of history.