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Preface

... just as terror, and abjection that is its doublet, must be excluded from the regime of the community, so it must be sustained and assumed, singularly, in writing as its condition. – Lyotard (1993), p. 210

Therapy may be mad. Here, therapy means particularly psychotherapy and counselling, but can be taken to signify the whole therapeutic culture of well-being, with which the West currently covers its nihilism. Therapy boasts honesty, truth and reconciliation in every area of life from the personal, to the institutional, to the multinational corporation, to democracy itself. More and more people believe in therapy because they have lost belief in everything else. For a long time now it has been punching above its weight, caught in a delirium of empathic rooting-out of oppression, clearing the field for its own mopping-up operation, its own peace-keeping role – the postmodern universal ideology of rights and empowerment.

Can psychoanalysis, as distinct from therapy, claim to be different? Psychoanalysis, as an extended description of human subjectivity, is not a therapy, as such, but an encounter with what *moves* people and what constitutes the *truth of desire*. It comes from a contemplative or reflective tradition. It is also an interpretive discourse: at one earlier time an imperialist metalanguage interpreting literature, art and culture; at another, subject to deconstruction itself. The key notion here is the unconscious,¹ which destabilises *any* ideological position. However, psychoanalysis no longer escapes irony. Particularly, the irony that psychoanalysis, in recent times, has done much to weaken the *autonomous* subject and indirectly accelerate the end of Western hegemony in the world. This process is now far advanced.

However, irony tends to be lost in the serious business of being therapeutic. It becomes very difficult to write about *loss*, the subject matter of psychoanalysis, in a world that only celebrates *more*, more of everything, that advocates continual positivity and entertainment, where silence is impossible and depression endemic.

Therapy culture has an answer for *every* human need. This is precisely our problem: how to write about *another* reality, which now is completely unclearly defined, which is perhaps an impossible limit point that *escapes* therapeutic concern and therefore, in a sense, does not even exist! This book is a small collection of essays that attempt to refute, challenge and contest, this widespread belief in integrative goodness and tranquilisation through gratification, personal, technological and political. Not only do these soft strategies *not* touch the problem of, let us say, the *inhuman*, but may yet be a cynical distraction, creating delusions of hope. Notwithstanding, solutions proliferate in the free market, to the precise degree that there may be *no* solutions. In this respect, the therapeutic world view is our last great illusion. Therapy is our last reservoir of meaning, the transcendental sign under which we all live and to which we evermore desperately cling.

These themes are taken up in the chapters, which follow. They can be read in any order and some repetition is inescapable. Broadly, however, Chapter One takes on therapeutic ideology and the promise of universal growth. Chapter Two asks the question about the *ethical* responsibility of the subject unknowingly *de-centred* by the death drive. Chapter Three concerns the family, relationships and the rights of the child. Finally, Chapter Four looks at the postmodern situation in the light of the great instabilities created by exponential global consumption.

Notes

1. As the unconscious is the pivotal concern of psychoanalytic/cultural theorising, the reader may be helped by tentatively identifying a number of possible overlapping meanings in our relationship to this meta-concept.
 - (1) The unconscious does not exist, or if it does, it is either harmless or it can be effortlessly integrated with the conscious to maintain health. Therapy culture generally privileges this take on the unconscious as do the natural sciences and modern liberal democracies. The subject is autonomous and rational, yet needs empowering. Nothing need be secret; transparency is the ideal.
 - (2) In the Name-of-the-Father, the level of the monotheistic religions and psychoanalysis. The subject is split and contradictory, barred by repression. Here, the unconscious is the discourse of Otherness, foreign, secret and uncanny.
 - (3) The unconscious as the other of textual deconstructions: psychoanalytic theory in the academy where the text has many meanings *other* to what was intended by the author.
 - (4) In the Name-of-the-Mother, dancing *with* the Shadow, Pagan New Age spirituality, the unconscious as celebratory release and creativity and 21st Century therapy. Here the unconscious is *our friend*.
 - (5) The unconscious as *radically* Other, the death drive, irreconcilability: *fatal* strategies (Baudrillard) and ethics (Levinas).