

Native psychotherapy in Russia *

Mark E. Burno

Russian Medical Academy of Postgraduate Education
Department of Psychotherapy, Moscow

Summary

The peculiarities of Russian psychotherapy, first of all, are connected in their origin with native national-psychological features of the Russians and especially Russian intelligentsia. These national-psychological peculiarities can be seen at different times in Russian science and Russian art. These are anxiety dreaming, impracticability and, at the same time, inclination to complicated realistic, materialistic analysis with deep sympathy for the suffering "little man". It is just this together with social conditions and changes that brought about the appearance of the Russian psychotherapeutic approaches. First of all it is the traditional, native Russian Clinical Psychotherapy. These are Russian Existential Psychotherapy and Russian Clinical Psychoanalysis.

Key words: Russia, psychotherapy, culture, suffering

Russia is a vast and spiritually complex country located between the idealistically intellectual West and idealistically sensual East. It is a country with its own soul which often seems mysterious to foreigners. The peculiarities of the Russian spirit are known to the world from the writings of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Andrew Platonov. Some of these are Oblomov's inability to act decisively, dreaming, impracticality and inclination to deep, complex and at the same time mainly materialistic analysis which is anxious, unsure of itself and accompanied by earthly, warm human compassion to poor, humiliated and suffering people. This analysis is also normally aimed at improving social well-being. These qualities could be observed best of all with many typical members of Russian intelligentsia (not intellectuals but intelligentsia) not necessarily Russian by birth but by roots. The same properties can be clearly seen not only in classical Russian literature with deep psychological insight but also in realistic painting (for example, so called itinerants), in Russian philosophy and in Russian clinical medicine. We have never had classic intellectually powerful idealistic philosophy similar to the one of Kant, Hegel or anything resembling the heights of Yaspers'

* This paper was presented as a keynote lecture at the 3rd Congress of the World Council for Psychotherapy, Vienna, Austria, and 17th July, 2002.

Дискуссия о русской психотерапии
на конференции "О развитии психотерапии
в России и за рубежом" (2002),
г. Вена, 17.07.2002 г.

or Heidegger's existential cosmic philosophy. Russian existential religious philosophy represented by Soloviev, Florensky, Bulgakov, Berdyaev, Frank is something very different, something full of warm and enlightened spirit as well as clearly seen intention to use it for positive social applications. But at the same time we have had classic materialistic philosophy of Belinsky, Dobrolyubov, Herzen, Chernyshevsky and Plekhanov which was even more social by its nature. The warmth and colourful images of Russian philosophy very often originate from our artistic culture and are dissolved in it. It is quite natural that the spiritual qualities of Russian intelligentsia mentioned above have developed active compassion to an 'insignificant' humiliated, dreaming, impractical, lazy and even drunk poor man as well as revolutionary thinking with the people. It is very sad to admit it but the same features contributed to the development of revolutionary atrocities and formation of the socialist totalitarian state. It is all very interwoven in life.

Spiritual peculiarities of the typical members of Russian intelligentsia have significantly affected the development of psychotherapy in Russia.

I would not like to speak in detail about the technical psychotherapy, that is, Hypnosis, Training, Behavioral forms, etc. All these developed more or less simultaneously in Europe and in Russia. In Europe it was done by Bernheim, Forel and in Russia - by Bekhterev, Kantorovich and Svyadosh. I would like to speak about the founders of our personal spiritual psychotherapy. 'Personal' here means that the person of a psychotherapist, so to say, enters the person of his patient bringing him some healing effect. Personal psychotherapy always has clear national psychological peculiarities of this or that nation. In Russia its founders were: somatologist and psychotherapist Alexander Yarotsky (1866-1944) [1, 2] and psychiatrist and psychotherapist Semen Konstorum (1890-1950) [3, 4, 5]. Yarotsky [1, 2] developed the healing altruistic vision of the world, the ability to see beauty in the most modest nature as well as the interest to social ideals and social aspirations with his somatic patients (Yarotsky Aretetherapy). As a spiritual materialist he was confident that a human being lived as long as he possessed the spiritual light of altruism in his soul. Konstorum [3, 4, 5] created the Russian Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapeutic School. As Ernst Kretschmer [6, 7, 8] he was naturally confident that a psychotherapist must base all his psychotherapeutic work exceptionally on the clinical picture which he had analyzed in detail. Konstorum [3, 4, 5] thought that the main thing in psychotherapy was the healing vital activity or active life (Konstorum Activating Psychotherapy). He was epicurically active himself and he always required his patients to be active, to choose occupation for themselves and to find useful social applications for what they were doing. He was confident that activity and occupation to a much greater extent than words brings a light optimistic attitude to life and convinces patients that they are much stronger and more important than they thought they were themselves. In other cases he explained to his patients in a quiet, friendly, witty and humorous way why their fears were groundless. Or in a grim but sincere way he could psychotherapeutically sympathize with his patient's tragedy and tell him about the tragedies he himself had experienced in the past.

Like the whole of psychotherapy the Practical Psychoanalysis developed comparatively slowly in Russia even in the first third of the 20th century when Psychoanalysis was not yet banned. Even then in psychotherapeutic practical applications it was often combined with Hypnosis, Rational, and Behavioural therapy in the traditional Russian way. I think the reason for it lies in the realistic and anxious peculiarities of the Russian soul. I also believe that the multimodular structure of the Russian psychotherapy mentioned by Victor Makarov [9, 10, 11] originates from the same root.

In tragic Stalin times we had no psychotherapeutic schools. Very few doctors practiced psychotherapy as it had been earlier. After Stalin's death in 1953 the revival of psychotherapy occurred. Moscow Hypnosis School headed by Vladimir Rozhnov (1918-1998) developed in the 60's. In the 80's the "Emotion and Stress" ('rising' the soul) psychotherapeutic school also headed by Rozhnov was formed. Its historical basis was made by works of Yarotsky [1, 2] and Selie. In the 60's in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) the school of Pathogenesis orientated on Therapy of Neuroses was formed. That was the name given to his psychoanalytic method by Vladimir Myasishhev (1893-1973). Some Marxist features saved it from ideological persecution. Later Psychological Group Psychotherapy borrowed from socialist countries started to be practiced in Leningrad. However psychotherapy was ideologically controlled up to Gorbachev's perestroika. I remember how even in the early 80's, when a psychotherapist described complex psychological sufferings of a patient in detail as well as his own psychotherapeutic work with him going beyond the framework of hypnosis and direct particular explanations given to the patient, he was severely reproached for practicing psychoanalysis. The works of writers and artists living in Russia in the times of Stalin and later, up to the collapse of the Soviet power, were too often full of artificial socialist optimism. But it practically did not affect the psychotherapy which was hidden inside medicine. In 1985 "psychotherapy" was legalized as a profession. The number of psychotherapists constantly grew and as far as I can see being an old teacher of psychotherapy, most of them remained warm and compassionate people sympathizing with their patients. They, maybe more than other doctors, preserved the spirit of the old Russian intelligentsia in themselves.

The collapse of the Soviet power brought complete freedom to the Russian psychotherapy. It started to be practiced by psychologists as well. Our psychotherapists go to the West for educational purposes. Western teachers come to our country. One can observe unbelievable kaleidoscopic versatility of psychotherapeutic methods in Russia. The governmental authorities recognized even the Holotropic Psychotherapy of Graf as a scientific method. It goes without saying that borrowed Western psychotherapy requires a lot of work to be properly adapted for the Russian soul. At the same time the traditional Russian psychotherapy which has always been practiced here and which really helps many typical Russian patients and especially modern members of Russian intelligentsia enjoys free development. As far as I can see, this school is unique and in its complete form cannot be found anywhere in the world.

So, what kind of psychotherapy is this?

This Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapy is traditional for Russia. It started to form at the beginning of the 20th century within the framework of Russian and German

Clinical Psychiatry. By the middle of the 20th century the Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapy was almost totally subdued by the Psychoanalysis as well as Psychological and Eclectic Psychotherapy in the West. However, in Russia the Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapy has survived and formed quite completely behind the protective walls of clinical medicine. It is an integral part of the clinical medicine and is full of hearty warmth in the traditional Russian way. I believe, that the realistic warmth of our psychotherapy was attained by the fact that the most interesting and important literary works we learned in detail at school in the Soviet times, were books belonging to the classic Russian literature. The classical bases of the Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapy have been stipulated in the works of Ernst Kretschmer [6, 7, 8] and Semen Konstorum [3, 4, 5]. The Russian Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapy is spiritually consonant to the Russian materialistic philosophy, Russian literature with psychological insight and realistic painting. Our Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapy is also governed by the psychological materialism hearty compassion to a suffering human being and aspiration to positive social application. The Clinical Psychotherapy sees and feels the origin of not only psychopathological symptoms and syndromes but also of the most complex characterological feelings and sufferings and the finest movements of the spirit to be the corporeal one. At the same time the clinical psychotherapist can be deeply spiritual and exalted as Chekhov, a writer with great psychological insight and also a doctor. This is earthly spirituality. Corporeality is irradiating spirit here as in the pictures of many realistic painters. Through spirituality one can see the original corporeality here. Spirit and body here form a unity. At the same time the psychotherapist with his own nature feels the corporeality to be the initial element both in himself and in others. The clinical picture is a living and talking map of his psychotherapeutic search for him. This map tells him how the patient's own nature developing in accordance with its own laws protects itself from some harmful influences, both external and genetically internal. This all provides the doctor with the idea how this nature should be assisted in a psychotherapeutic way. As it is well known Hippocrates who was the founder of clinical medicine considered Nature as the most important doctor. A human doctor is only able to assist the nature reasonably by trying to understand its surprising but spontaneous, that is, to a certain extent imperfect work. The Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapy is able to revive and activate all known original human psychotherapeutic mechanisms (suggestive, group, cognitive, creative, etc.) but in the clinical way, that is, in accordance with the clinical picture presenting them in a rather strict form of indications and contraindications going together with the clinical therapeutic efficiency evaluation (along with other evaluations), etc. The full-blooded, robust and heartfelt Clinical Psychotherapy corresponds to the peculiarities of many Russian patients with complex souls. For example, in the cases of chronic constant anxious depression accompanied by the patient's painful suffering of his inferiority it helps him to investigate the nature of his own soul in different creative manifestations. It helps him to investigate his own depressive, obsessive or depersonalization disorders and characterological radicals. The purpose of all this for a patient is to find ways originating from his own nature leading him to the world of stable healing creative inspiration filled with Love and Sense. The Clinical Psychiatric Psy-

chotherapy does not expect the relationship of a psychotherapist and his patient to be neutral as in psychoanalysis or use the technique of Rogers empathy but it expects the therapist to be earthly compassionate to his patient as it is typical for Russia and to worry sincerely for him. This warm spiritual compassion can be felt also in the Russian hypnotic sessions. Many Russian patients do not like Ericssonian Hypnosis. They want to open their souls to a kind warm psychotherapist. They would like to ask him to enter their anxious lost souls in a healing way and to calm them down. My Creative Self Expression Therapy of chronic, anxious and depressive disorders is also a method of the Russian Clinical Psychotherapy [12, 13, 14].

Existential Psychotherapeutic Approach with its spirituality is to a certain extent close to the Clinical Psychiatric Psychotherapy. Its vision of the world could be compared to the painting of Borisov-Musatov and Nesterov. Here the earthly corporeal forms are preserved but they are back-lighted by the idea that spirit is initial. By the way, in the same way many psychopathological symptoms are back-lighted by the idea that spirit is initial, as Yaspers saw them.

The Existential Psychotherapy in its Russian mostly religious version has already become popular with Russian autistic intellectual patients and clients as well as the Russian religious philosophy and films by Andrey Tarkovsky that have found their audience. These are: Tragedy Therapy ("How to Survive Tragedy") of Fedor Vasilyuk [15] and Orthodox Intensive Therapeutic Life of Alexander Alekseychik [16] which only apparently might look as hooliganism.

The Psychoanalytic Classic Approach with its complex symbolic vision of life is consonant to the symbolic art of, for example, Petrov-Vodkin, Kandinsky as well as Western intellectual philosophic idealism. It is hard to believe that it will ever be widely spread in Russia unless the term 'psychoanalysis' is widened as it is often the case in Russia nowadays to include quite realistic analysis of personal spiritual sufferings of patients. However, our own adaptations of Psychoanalysis have already been effectively working in Russia for some time. These are: Personally Orientated (Reconstructive) Psychotherapy of Neuroses by Boris Karvasarsky [17], Galina Isurina, Victor Tashlykov created on the basis of the Pathogenetic Psychotherapy of Myasishhev; Opening Reconstructive Psychotherapy of patients with slowly progredient schizophrenia by Victor Vid [17]; the Eastern Version of Transact Analysis by Victor and Galina Makarov [10, 11]; Russian Clinical Psychoanalysis by Boris Egorov [18].

Finally, different purely technical psychotherapeutic forms are used in Russia now to help patients and clients with relatively simple souls and minds.

References

1. Yarotsky AI. *Idealizm kak fiziologichesky faktor*. Yuryev: Yuryevsky Universitet; 1908. p. 304.
2. Yarotsky AI. *O psihoterapii pri hronicheskikh vnutrenih boleznyah*. Russky Vrach. 1917, 25-28, 433-444.
3. Konstorum SI. *K postanovke voprosa ob aktiviruyuhschey terapii psihonevrozov*. Zhurnal nevropatologii i psichiatrii. 1930, 3, 79-90.
4. Konstorum SI. *Psihoterapia schizofrenii*. In: Geyer TA. ed. *Problemi pogranichnoy psichiatrii*. Moskva/Leningrad: Gosizdat biologicheskoy i medizinskoy literatury; 1935. p 287-309.

5. Konstorum SI. *Optyt prakticheskoy psihoterapii*. 2nd ed. Moskva: Minzdrav RSFSR; 1962. p. 224.
6. Kretschmer E. *Der Aufbau der Persönlichkeit in der Psychotherapie*. Zeitschr. f. d. ges. Neurol. Bd. 1934, 150 (5): 729–739.
7. Kretschmer E. *Psychotherapeutische Studien*. Stuttgart: Thieme; 1949. p. 207.
8. Kretschmer E. *Medizinische Psychologie*. 14 Aufl. Herausg. W. Kretschmer. Stuttgart: Thieme; 1975. p. 244.
9. Makarov VV. *Psihoterapia novogo veka*. Moskva: Akademichesky proekt; 2001. p. 496.
10. Makarov VV. *Psihoterapia v Rossiyskoy Federatsii*. Professionalnaya psihoterapevticheskaya gazeta. 2002, 3, (1): 3–11.
11. Makarov VV, Makarova GA. *Tranzakty analiz – vostochnaya versia*. Moskva: Akademichesky proekt; 2002. p. 494.
12. Burno ME. *La thérapie clinique par auto-expression*. Psychothérapies. 1994, 1, 49–55.
13. Burno ME. *Klinicheskaya psihoterapiya*. Moskva: Akademichesky proekt; 2000. p. 719.
14. Burno ME. *Therapy by means of creative self-expression*. Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy. 2002, 4 (2): 49–53.
15. Vasilyuk FE. Perezhit gore. In: Frolov IT. ed. *O chelovecheskom v cheloveke*. Moskva: Izdatelstvo politicheskoy literatury; 1991. p.230–247.
16. Alekseychik AE. *Intensivnaya terapevticheskaya zhizn*. Nezavisimy psihiatrichesky zhurnal. 1999, 1, 26–51.
17. Karvasarsky BD. ed. *Psihoterapevticheskaya entsiklopedia*. Sankt-Piterburg: Piter Kom; 1998. p. 752.
18. Egorov BE. *Rossiysky klinicheskyy psichoanaliz – novaya schkola*. Moskva: Akademichesky proekt; 2002. p. 528.

Author's address:

Professor Mark E. Burno
Weshniakovskaja Street, 4-1-101
Moscow, 111402
Russia