

Don D. Jackson: Selected Essays at the Dawn of an Era

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In the beginning, there was a systemic view of family process and organization that was immediately attacked and misunderstood. It presented an authentic alternative to psychology, psychiatry, and sociology, offering a more practical and humane way of addressing human suffering in the context of therapeutic conduct. The primary architect of this interactional, relational, and typically brief approach was Don D. Jackson.

Although some of his ideas were further disseminated by John Weakland, Jay Haley, and Paul Watzlawick, and by those who had associations with the aforementioned, such as Salvador Minuchin and Richard Fisch, for the most part, family therapy that is based on well grounded systems and communicational theory is as misunderstood and dismissed today as it was when Jackson originally proposed it.

We have good reason to celebrate the arrival of this remarkable collection of essays penned by Don D. Jackson. And who better to present his seminal work than Wendel Ray, senior research fellow and former director of the Mental Research Institute that Jackson founded in 1958! Ray, the director of the Don D. Jackson Archive since the late 1980's and professor of family therapy at the University of Louisiana at Monroe (arguably the most systemically oriented family therapy graduate program in the world), has masterfully organized the book into three sections: Early Clinical Observations, Defining an Interactional Theory of Human Relationships, and Research into the Nature of Human Interaction. These chapters enable us to examine the intellectual skills and clinical wisdom of a true original.

I invite all psychotherapists and family therapists to pretend that the field of family therapy does not exist today. Imagine that it simply has not yet been invented. Now continue to fantasize that for the first time, this collection of essays invites you to a radically different way of understanding and working with human relationship systems. Imagine the surprise, thrill, and potential these ideas and case illustrations would bring to you. This is how the early open-minded readers and scholars first reacted to his contributions. Of course, not every reader was friendly. Those who had pledged their lives to being defenders of already established traditions were upset with the implications of Jackson's ideas. They immediately recognized that his ideas were not simply another set of notions to add to one's eclectic filing cabinet. No, the Jackson call was for an abandonment of ideas and practices that were systemically blind and ignorant. This meant a revolution, a charge to close down practically all orientations to the people helping professions.

It is no wonder that his work has been forgotten and marginalized. More importantly, anyone now reading these essays will see that most of what is taught and practiced and published today is essentially the same sort of thing that Jackson called us to walk away from. Family therapy had a brief moment of clarity when Jackson was on the scene, followed by some credible contributions made largely by those who were associated with him. But for the most part, the field has become an ever-expanding tower of psychological, sociological, political, and postmodern babble, with little understanding or advancement of the systemic paradigm.

Don Jackson was remarkable because he was equally brilliant as a theorist and as a clinician. One can only marvel at how things might have been different if his charismatic

leadership had been permitted to occupy the stage. Due to an early tragic death, we missed his voice during the time that family therapy became a recognized profession. It surely would have been more difficult for the field to slip back into interpretative postures, sociological reframings of systems theory, and the reifications (and trivializations) of gender and culture. He would have led us to seeing how any issue, metaphor, or controversy can be systemically and interactionally understood. We might have become a family therapy that maintained an emphasis upon systemic patterns of interaction.

The provocative news is that the climate today is, for all practical purposes, really not much different than the time when Jackson's essays first appeared. I therefore invite you to read his words with an open mind, knowing that if you get what he is talking about, you are set for quite a thrilling journey. You will discover an alternative way of being in therapy. Tired of the last two decades of family therapy fads? Are you ready to take responsibility and act in therapy? Do you want to know what it feels like to join a revolution that cares little for the politics of workshop performers and the licensing exams of professional organizations? If you are curious or ready for change, fasten your seat belt and read these essays as if they were being discovered for the first time. I dare you to do so. And I challenge you, along with your colleagues, to pick up where Jackson and some of his colleagues left off. Bring interactional thinking, a view of systemic patterns, and the wisdom of strategic interventions back into a field starved for effective action, systemic clarity, and rigorous imagination. Let this book be a new beginning, a firecracker that re-ignites the misfired charge that almost brought about a revolution of the field. After enjoying the theory and research papers of Volume 1, I eagerly await the

second volume of essays containing Jackson's best clinical papers. Cheers to Wendel Ray, one of the purest warriors of the systemic way!

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