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Psychology and the Political

Editorial *Dimitris Papadopoulos*

That the personal is political might be old news, but how to respond when these two domains seem to collapse into one another? The liberal vision: the individual in its private space, politics in the public space, the two domains interact, shape each other reciprocally, but exist separately. This picture no longer holds.

The public space becomes increasingly privatised: political institutions operate as corporations following the logic of the market; streets and squares are heavily policed and gated; our movements in public become trajectories on the closed circuit TVs of private security enterprises; flâneurs stroll through shopping malls and department stores; public access is regulated by codes and passwords: you can be denied them anytime; prisons become private industries. The exterior space of the publics becomes the interior architecture of a privatised labyrinthian megamachine.

And the personal becomes increasingly public: media images disseminate to the farthest recesses of private space, public politics is not out there, it is the spectacle colonizing your living room; pharmacogenomics, cognition enhancers, brain-boosters and psycho-drugs make of your body a battleground for biopharmaceutical research, collective fears and promises of salvation; psychotherapy, test culture, competence measurement and pop psychological literature become paths through which we perform the public; the new forms of post-fordist production demand the totality of your subjectivity and affective capacities; new labour structures seize almost every minute outside of work time—production and reproduction, production and consumption intermingle. The interior private space becomes the centre of the public field.

The collapse of the personal and the political, of the private and the public poses new questions about how to conceive the role of psychology in this situation. The initial premise of this special issue is that psychology in contemporary neo-liberal geo-culture is not just the continuation of politics by other means, it is politics itself. This represents a major shift taking place in the functioning of psychology in the last decades. The emergence of psychology as a discipline coincides with the broad expansion and consolidation of the disciplinary organization of North-Atlantic societies, a process that reaches its peak in the first half of the twentieth century. The structure of psychology, its disciplines and sub-

disciplines, are congruous with the disciplinary formation of society. Pedagogical psychology and developmental psychology, organizational psychology, personality and diagnostic psychology, clinical psychology, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis all shape and are shaped by their corresponding social institutions: the school, the factory, the prison, the hospital, the family. And of course psychology's obsession with test and quantification arises out of the need for malleable diagnostic instruments which can be easily adjusted to the different needs of social institutions regulating mass individuality: the army, the production line, the university, the enterprise, the polytechnic, the social welfare office, the social security office—all need flexible selection tools to steer the passage of people from one institution to the other.

But this is no longer the case. Adieu Foucault. Beginning slowly after World War II and more rapidly since the seventies and eighties, psychology starts to transform itself, reacting to and preparing for the metamorphosis of disciplinary society into new forms of social organization and social control. The boundaries of the social disciplines increasingly implode while the psychological sub-disciplines become progressively more inappropriate. Psychology was always the most positivist and empiricist of all social sciences: it was very keen and eager to react drastically to its social context. In this new situation, order and the control of individuals' social life are gradually shifting away from just being regulated through psychology's sub-disciplinal expertise and through clear-cut societal disciplinal institutions. Institutions merge together, their practices dissolve, become interchangeable and amalgamate in new virtual spaces.

The factory transforms itself into the corporation by elaborating the system of variant salaries and rewards, of differential performance for each different worker. The corporation becomes your employer and simultaneously your client. This functional logic of the corporation expands and begins to dominate even state and communal agencies and welfare institutions. It demands that individuals steadily reappraise their educational standing and qualifications in order to maintain their position in the fluid distribution of employment. School and education become increasingly privatised, in the process exploding the limits of the universal educational "moratorium of adolescence". The acquisition of new skills and competences, the proliferation of private training institutes, courses, and additional professional qualifications extend knowledge acquisition beyond the spatial and temporal limits of school and formal education. The medicalisation of everyday life intersects and interrupts the centrality of the hospital in public health. New medical technologies dissect the individual and treat it as set of potential risks. Individuals are virtual composites of their codi-

fied biomedical coordinates. Databases and automated health management programs replace doctors and health care. Way beyond this, the medicalisation and biologisation of individual existence serve as constant companions of the individual in his/her existence in other social spaces. School performance, social communication, labour competencies are related to genetic capacities and the health constitution of the individual. Imprisonment extends beyond the barriers of the prison. The new prison is there to regulate social struggles. Massive incarceration and the eruption of the prison-industrial complex are new ways of dealing with social inequality by actively incarcerating what have become "superfluous" and "irrelevant" strata for corporate society. But what is most important here is that the prison transforms, mutates, and creeps into every-day life. The new prison does not look like the traditional prison, it severs the relation between the signifier "prison" and the signified "deviance": its new signified is "management of social antagonisms" and it works by including large numbers of people in excluded spaces. The social mechanisms of post-fordist, post-disciplinary societies work by excluding people through their inclusion in highly regulated spaces. There is the proliferation of "exclusion through inclusion" that is characteristic of the implosion of the traditional penal institution. Consider, for example, all the different forms of internment which are employed to control the mobility of migratory movements and the effective organization of the labour market; or the mushrooming of all the different forms of detention, from detention camps to individual detention using high-tech tracing methods and biomedical data.

The erosion of disciplinary institutions does not mean that they disappear. Nor does it mean, as governmentality theory asserts, that the responsibility shifts from the institution to the individual who now steps forward to assume the agony of the collapsing public space (rather, this seems to be the fantasy of neoliberal ideologues). It simply means that the regulation of individual existence slips out of the institution's or individual's hands, shaping new free-floating devices of control which aggregate different branches of knowledge, different institutional practices, different individual investments. And what happens is that these devices of control are particularly adaptable and plastic—they can be easily adjusted to each given situation in contrast to the heavy discursive practices of the institutions or the limited agentic capacities of each individual. Social control becomes omnipresent.

In this situation, psychology is no longer concerned with the calibration and management of the individual, it is not concerned with fabricating individuality in the guise of the institutions of power, it rather attacks individuality *en gros*.

Its new role is to dissect and dissolve individuality and recombine it into new effective virtual compositions. The conceptualisation of the sociopolitical role of psychology, as Kurt Danziger, Nikolas Rose and others proposed, is fine for tracing the historical genesis of psychology but it is not much of an aid to understanding its contemporary workings. Psychology no longer deals with the link between subject, agency and power; it wants to get rid of all three and construct powerful composites which accumulate in their bodies different aspects of the public and the private, the natural and the artificial, the personal and the political. The individual only looks like an individual in its apparent bodily shape (even this won't last very much longer), in reality it becomes a genetic source, an automated client, a set of competencies, a self-creating assemblage of skills, a register and a code, an informant of himself or herself or of others to the new databases of control. It is not an information society we live in; it is a society of informers. Informing is no longer a marginal, sordid, despicable, mean-minded practice; it becomes the basis of the new ethics of control. You start with suspected visa overstayers, move on to illegal migrants, to your peculiar neighbours, to your colleagues who you think are ineffective and unproductive, to your ill friends, and you end up with yourself, your anxieties, your health risks, your inefficacies, your susceptible fantasies. Dob-in others and yourself to the megamachine of control. An operator will answer your call during normal business hours.



Appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 6-7, 2004, p. 80

Psychology not only responds to the dissolution of disciplinary society but it seems itself to constitute one of the many axes on which this process unfolds. The traditional structure of psychology's sub-disciplines is changing. New trends are emerging that exceed and reconfigure existing areas of responsibility and ranges of competence—the old sub-disciplinary structure of psychology is in crisis. As stated above, psychology is not the continuation of politics by other means; it becomes politics itself. This is because its new branches, theories and practices no longer serve the disciplinary formation of power; they are direct elements of the new free-floating devices of control. Psychology's new branches—developmental science, cognitive science, health psychology, affective studies, artificial intelligence, neurosciences, evaluation and measurement studies—do not figure as regulators for the administration of mass individuality and the fabrication of appropriate subjects in each different disciplinary institution. Rather they constitute multidisciplinary, polymorphic, and highly adaptable instruments for the direct and immediate execution of political and social claims. Even the emergence of alternative currents in psychology in past decades—such as discursive psychology, cultural psychology, or social constructionist accounts—often fulfils a similar function. These currents are not attached and assigned to specific social values, positions or subjectivities suppressed and marginalized by disciplinary power. They do not possess a positive value or liberation capacity as such; they just are versatile devices which can be implemented as components of wider aggregates of control whenever a specific situation requires what they have to offer. Psychology's new branches exist, or better, make sense as far as they perform well in instigating effective and subjectless instruments which perpetuate the new integrated space of control.

It is the employment of such instruments on which claims for political inclusion, upward social mobility, and the exercise of power become articulated and materialized. And materialized should be understood literally here: Individuals do not become subjects, there is no subjectification process at work here; rather individuals split, reset and restart again and again, reassemble, recombine themselves utilizing the protean devices floating on a horizontal unified space of control. This is the moment where psychology becomes politics itself. Using psychology's new expertise doesn't incorporate you in a discursive formation or a disciplinary institution through which power is ordered. It rather brings you directly to the heart of political power. These are post-Foucauldian times we live in. There are no more individuals out there to be surveyed and disciplined; there are no public politics or associations of civil society to which someone can contribute to. There are just blurred configurations of more or less successful social agents. Individuals become divisions of themselves, assemblages of bio-

physical capacities, cognitive competencies, and affective/motivational enhancers. Post-fordism and neo-liberalism push the liberal logic to its limits: They fabricate individuals or communities as social actors without any longer being able to preserve a space for a coherent, even if only minimal, subjective space. The subjective, the personal, the private are collapsing into the public and the political. The aim of this special issue is to rethink psychology, its disciplines and its subjects on the edge of the omnipresence of control and the omnicrisis of liberal politics in North-Atlantic societies. The new situation in which we find ourselves is no better or worst than before, it just needs new concepts and new tools to deal with it, to intervene with it. This special issue hopes to be a contribution to that process.

The first three papers deal with the historical conjunctions of psychology and politics. Paul Stenner shows how psychology constructed its subject matter primarily through an investment of the discipline in an elaboration of the relation between the question of natural right and the formation of subjectivity. Stenner's work is a powerful elucidation of how the social tasks psychology adopted are intrinsically related to the juridico-political system of liberal societies. Fernando Álvarez-Uría delineates the historical genesis of the psychologisation of the self as a process of endless and limitless exploration of individuals' inwardness. Uría's journey through the cultural paths leading to the psychologisation of the self arrives in contemporary times and describes how this cult of inwardness produces the subject currently proliferating in neoliberal politics and in the market of emotions. Anna Stetsenko and Igor Arieivitch investigate the situatedness of L.S. Vygotsky's ideas in the social and political conditions of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary Soviet Union and show that the reception of his ideas in the West portrays a typical case of how mainstream psychology constructs its own past and its others according to its current political engagements. But Stetsenko and Arieivitch not only read Vygotsky's reception in the West as symptomatic for a presentist approach to history but also as a tradition of thought which offers an alternative conception of knowledge production as a collaborative practical engagement with social and political transition.

The second block of papers attempts to rethink the relation between psychology, social movements, and their role in the changing landscape of science and politics. Jill Morawski and Kimberly Nelson dissect the intriguing plot linking feminism, evolutionary biology, and liberal politics on the base of the sperm competition theory widely circulating within scientific and popular literature. They show how feminist ideas about sex/gender difference have been recuper-

ated by recent trends in evolutionary biology fostering a new biologicistic configuration of the gender economy of liberal societies, one which seeks to make us believe that the notion of the independent, autonomous actor of liberal politics pertains not only to men, but also to women and is thus determined by our universal biological constitution. The conversation between Ghassan Hage and Dimitris Papadopoulos addresses the emergence of recent forms of subjectivity in relation to new qualities of the migrational movements in contemporary transnational capitalism. Hage discusses his thesis that transnationalist capitalist societies are particularly characterised by a radical shrinkage in the distribution of hope in relation to questions of mobility, inclusion/exclusion, belonging and citizenship widely discussed in the context of new migrational movements.

Finally, the third block of papers addresses the challenge of promoting new emancipatory forms of intervention in psychological theory and practice. Starting with a presentation of his concept of simultaneity as participation in shared and collectively organized social spaces, Ben Bradley illustrates some fascinating examples of action research and "social experimentation" which attempt to radically rethink psychology as a genuinely transformational engagement with the social world. Similarly, Ángel Gordo López and Joan Pujol Tarrés propose that what is needed to facilitate the formation of new non-hegemonic social movements is not the retreat from psychological work but its radicalisation and intensification. They demonstrate that at the core of labour and communication in post-fordist societies lies the psychological which needs, they argue, to be taken up rather than abandoned so as to invigorate new forms of disobedience in the centre of the production and communication processes of contemporary societies. Addressing the question of how to radicalise psychology's contribution to political change, Niamh Stephenson rearranges the contours of a counter-hegemonic sociability in times where the distinction between liberation and subjectification seems to blur almost completely. Rather than use the common concepts of similarity, recognition or reflexivity, Stephenson employs the ideas of contagion, unrepresentability, and digestion of the other to open up alternative vistas of sociability: a new common ground as against the non-place of hegemonic forms of social exclusion and neoliberal politics.

This issue could not have been realized without the valuable and indispensable contribution of friends and colleagues to all the various stages of its preparation: Jens Brockmeier, Steve Brown, Wendy Brown, Erica Burman, Richard Cleminson, Brownyn Davies, Michelle Fine, Angel Gordo López, Douglas Henderson, Martin Hildebrand-Nilshon, Ian Hodges, Nadya Nenadich, Christopher

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Peet, Elspeth Probyn, Kane Race, Ernst Schraube, Marsha Rosengarten, Corinne Squire, Niamh Stephenson. I would like to particularly thank Valerie Walkerdine for making this special issue possible and for encouraging this endeavour. Many thanks are due to the editorial assistants of the journal, Theophilus Gokah and Peter Bansel, for their helpful and continuous assistance. Finally, I am grateful to Noël O'Callaghan for providing an image from Douglas Henderson's performance "69: on the day i was reset," Dublin Fringe Festival, City Arts Centre, 2003.