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Psychology, subjectivity and resistance

One of the lessons of Klaus Holzkamp's work is that human psychology will not always take the form that it has in the twentieth century. A Marxist understanding of the particular character of psychology under capitalism also makes it possible for us to look at how psychology may change as capitalism changes, and even at how psychology may be different when capitalism has come to an end. I am not going to speculate here about the soul of man or woman under socialism. Partly because that would be out of keeping with Marx's suspicion of blueprints for the future, and partly because it would be out of keeping with the very concrete analyses Holzkamp provided. It is also partly because socialism seems a long way off in these grim times. What I do want to do is to look at some changes which might lead us into the twenty-first century as a different place for psychology.

Before we can look at what psychologists are going to be doing in the next century, I think we should look at what they are doing at the moment. What are psychologists up to now? One answer would be that they are bit by bit discovering more and more about human behaviour and the mind, about us. The problem with that answer is that as quickly as we find out things about ourselves, so those things seem to vanish before our eyes. Either we find that such and such a group or culture does not behave or think like the model would predict, or we find - and there is cause for great hope and optimism here - that our awareness, our reflection upon a process described by psychologists *changes* that process. One of the most powerful contributions to the new paradigm and discursive revolutions in psychology (in Britain at least) in the last twenty years or so has been the idea that it is in the nature of human nature to change, to change as different linguistic resources and representations of the self become available, and to change itself as people reflect on who they are and who they may be. Despite the hostility of some discourse theorists to Marxism, this emphasis on self-reflection and change does connect the new paradigm with dialectics, with a notion of agency as situated, as carrying and struggling with the weight of history. So we need a different answer to the question 'What are psychologists up to now?'

We need to step back and look at the images of the self they produce, the types of practices they engage in, and the power those practices, those technologies of the self have to set *limits* on change. And we need to step back a little further to consider where the enterprise of psychology has come from, so we can trace some of the societal processes and cultural dynamics that frame it. We can *then* look at where it is going, and what it might look like in the next century. There is a danger, that we are so

used to reductionism in psychology, to looking at the individual abstracted from any social context, that we might be tempted to map out a future for the discipline that treats it as if it can be separated from culture and politics. What I want to do is to look at what psychology might become in *two* ways. You'll gather, as I describe these two visions, that I am suspicious of what psychologists are up to at the moment, and I want to point to some more helpful contributions they might make. I'll come to those two visions in a bit.

But first, why am I so suspicious? Well, it follows from the thought that 'psychological theories aren't true' that we should ask 'why do they work?' The problem is that for all the talk about the mutability and self-transformative capacity of human beings and the ways in which psychological models are continuously and repeatedly being dissolved and transcended, the discipline of psychology ninety nine percent of the time fixes upon certain models and restricts opportunities for movement, movement or empowerment. This is the tradition of academic work that Holzkamp described for us as 'variable-psychology'. Now I'm not saying that psychologists are malevolent. There are some psychologists who are nice facilitative empowering people. This room is full of them, yes? We'll come back to what the nice psychologists are doing later.

The point is that we are embedded in something that makes it difficult to be nice to people, something that we can call the 'psy-complex'. The psy-complex is the network of theories and practices, ideas and technologies that comprise academic and professional psychology and all the varieties of psychological talk that fill advice columns and day-time TV shows and everyday conversation. You might not feel responsible for all that talk outside the Universities and the Clinics, but *our* psychological talk does find its way out there eventually. Not immediately, but through popular discussion of research, expert commentaries on social issues and training of the range of people in welfare agencies, the 'para-psychologists'. (One of my colleagues in the Discourse Unit and the Hearing Voices Network, Terence McLaughlin, likes to use this term 'para-psychologists', and I've borrowed the term from him.) I don't think these people pick up their psychological expertise by telepathy mind you, but by having to pass course assessments where they are observed and graded til they believe what they are told.

There are two sides to the 'psy-complex'. This account draws on the work of the historian and philosopher Michel Foucault, but we could develop somewhat the same sort of argument from the theologian Ivan Illich or from Karl Marx. The tradition of German Critical Psychology has developed an explicitly Marxist analysis of psychology as a modern practice. When I use the work of Foucault, I should make it clear that I use him here as a Marxist, to write a history of psychology as a Marxist history. Many foucauldians see Marxism as a problem. We need to be aware of that, but let's move on. Foucault does help us identify and cla-

rify something of the nature of psychology, and his work usefully contextualises the accounts we develop of our psychological nature in the twentieth-century capitalist world.

One side of the psy-complex is discipline. Foucault, at the beginning of his book *Discipline and Punish*, describes the brutal sustained torture of an assassin, Damien, toward the end of the eighteenth century, a public attack on the body. He contrasts this with a prison regime barely fifty years later in the nineteenth century in which the inmates are shut away, where their bodies are supervised and their *minds* are the target of observation and punishment. Something incredibly important had changed in the nature of observation in that time. Damien's body was torn apart as punishment for an attempt to kill the king, in a context in which the gaze of the population was directed up to the top, to the centre of power. Now, in the modern prison regime, the gaze of the authorities is directed down upon the individual qualities of each soul. And it is here, only now that modern psychology, as we know it, makes sense. Foucault's discussion of the emergence of the modern prison is a metaphor for an architecture of surveillance, regulation and calibration that structures modern society. Variable-psychologists should think very carefully about what they are doing when they painstakingly set up a laboratory experiment and control independent variables or conditioned stimuli. This account should ring some bells for them.

The other side of the psy-complex is confession. Foucault, in Volume One of *The History of Sexuality*, unravels one of most potent myths about the modern self. His account once again hinges on the nineteenth century, and the contrast that we usually make between that society which repressed desire and our own which permits it, sometimes encourages it to be released. It is misleading, though, to think that when Victorians hid the piano legs they were simply excluding something. What that process of obsessive hiding and protection surely did was to continuously *create* the very thing they wanted to avoid. And now we suffer the flipside of that strange repression when we imagine that the more we speak about what is repressed within us, the more we will be free. Foucault's description of psychoanalysis as a discursive practice which condenses all that feels dangerous into sexuality and then makes the patient speak about it to 'release' it, as if it were inside them, is another powerful metaphor for the way in which we now think about the interior of our selves. It is an historical process of individualisation of distress and confession that has intensified. Forty years ago, for example, agony advice columns would contain prescriptions like - and this is a quote from Evelyn Home in the English *Woman* magazine - 'If that is your emotion stamp on it hard'. Now, we are invited, incited to talk about emotions that lie hidden inside as a prerequisite for helping our selves.

I am labouring this point a bit because this therapeutic side of the psy-complex often *appears* to be a progressive humanist alternative to posi-

tivist approaches in the discipline. Holzkamp developed a careful reading of psychoanalysis which drew out what the progressive appeal of Freud was to radical psychologists, how psychoanalysis aimed at the classical psychological task of understanding the 'immanent objective structure of human experience', and how it *fails* because of its reductionism and universalism. It is certainly true that humanist and psychoanalytic perspectives get little hearing in the discipline, but I would want to argue that they are always there as the underside of so-called 'scientific' psychology. It is tempting to turn to them, but they are really of a piece with the overall architecture of the psy-complex. Psychoanalysis is, as Erica Burman likes to say, the 'repressed other' of psychology. It is not necessarily a progressive alternative, for it is *constituted* as that which is irrational and which must be shut out. It is then only useful *tactically* because it is excluded and because it is a danger to variable-psychology. The converse applies, of course, to those positivist psychologists who are delighted to find in Foucault more ammunition against psychoanalysis. The point isn't only that psychoanalysis makes you confess, it is also that attempting to escape the confessional styles of humanist psychology by being neutral and scientific is no escape at all; rushing back to the laboratory is to flip back to the disciplinary side of the psy-complex, and it leaves the two sides intact. We need to understand that relationship dialectically, understand how each constitutes the other.

'Now hold on', you might be saying to yourselves, 'you sounded pretty humanist earlier on when you were talking about the self-transformative potential of human beings'. Well, I'm not arguing that human beings have some mystical core that we need to connect with. And I am not saying that we could become 'whole'. We could never be so because of the contradictory nature of language, of discourse. Foucault's account is simultaneously an account of practices, technologies of the self, and of competing discourses which define how we may make ourselves. It is certainly true that humanist discourse is a resource for us that we may draw upon to challenge the fake science that is modern variable-psychology, but so is psychoanalytic discourse. And there are spiritual discourses and economic discourses and many more that pull us in different directions. We position ourselves in those discourses, never outside them, because we could never be outside culture, and we cannot stick to one of them and fix its meaning, so we can never be whole. We are always *split* among the threads of language. That is why psychology is split, and always will be so. Furthermore - and this is another reason to be a little wary of simple humanism as a solution - we cannot take the discourses and put them on like clothes. The different accounts of the self that are available to us are part of institutions, practices, powerful technologies which structure what we may say and where we may say it. That is also, incidentally, why the new accounts that challenge main-

stream psychology can only be elaborated in new networks with new forms of institutional support, and this is one of the reasons we formed the Discourse Unit in Manchester.

Ok, its time to look to the future, to the next century. I'll have two shots at it. Here's one version. Psychology is rooted in modern technology, and now something spectacular is happening to technology, something which opens up new spaces for movement which seem to go beyond modern structures of surveillance and confession. These transformations started with the information technologies developed in the last fifty years described by the Belgian economist and revolutionary Marxist activist Ernest Mandel as the 'third industrial revolution' that lay the material basis for what he termed 'late capitalism' and what some writers call the 'postmodern condition'. Last year was a bad year for Marxists, and we have lost many gains and many comrades in the last few years. We are here to mark the contribution of Holzkamp, whose death has brought to a close an era of critique and struggle in psychology. I would also like to record my sadness that we also lost Ernest Mandel, who was not a psychologist but who contributed to critique and struggle in ways that many radical psychologists could learn from.

Some writers, including some optimists in psychology at the moment believe that the modern culture that Foucault described so well has mutated into a new postmodern culture. In place of the traditional obsession with the underlying causes of behaviour and social relationships we are now lucky enough, they tell us, to be living in a postmodern world where we are free to skim around on the surface without worrying about what is going on underneath or what will happen in the future. Some writers, such as Fukuyama working from the US State Department, have even gone so far as to argue that we are witnessing 'the end of history'. Goodbye to the old grand narratives about progress and science and personal truth that characterised Foucault's grim modernity. And goodbye to psychology perhaps. Now, it would seem, the world is open and a new relativist climate is upon us in which anything goes.

It's not as easy as that to escape modern culture, but there is growing within our culture a radically different material and mental environment. We need a materialist account of this new environment, and the way new forms of subjectivity are emerging in late capitalist society. I'm talking here specifically about 'cyberspace'. As the number of people plugging into electronic mail and the World Wide Web expands, and as the inhabitants of that virtual community become more adventurous, the network of networks that is the internet becomes a site for new realities and *new psychologies*. Something peculiar and exciting happens when we use email and enter cyberspace. We communicate in this space differently, faster, more directly. Our syntax is different, we follow the new rules of 'netiquette' and we develop new ways of displaying emotion.

Let me give you two examples. The commonly accepted way in email of conveying to another person that you are not being insulting, or that you intended your comments to be playful, or that you regret something that was said etcetera, is to use a combination of colons or semicolons, dashes and parentheses. These collections of signs are the 'emoticons' that accompany many email messages. Something very interesting is happening here, for at the same time as emailers are trying to reproduce everyday speech, trying to infuse it with the emotional tone we expect in face-to-face interaction, they are constructing something different. Not only is the range of emotions pared down, which changes the way each will be understood in that semiotic space, but the relationship between the emotional bit of the message and the content bit of the message are separated out. Now it is true that some rational choice psychologists and political scientists in the real world would already see emotions as separate, as things that keep you awake at night, but what is happening in email is that emotion is knocked out and then added in again as if that is the way human beings operate. I would argue that to be a competent self in this new space we then have to actually operate like that, we have to develop and play out a particular appropriate 'psychology'.

The second example concerns the speed with which relationships can be formed, and what those relationships might feel like. Here, as with the array of emotion talk in cyberspace, we can only get a rough sense of what this 'feel' to relationships might be like because I am translating it now to represent it to you so that it makes some sense in this forum, in what we like to think of as 'real' space. Email is very fast; you scroll through lots of messages, read them very quickly and send something back using the 'Reply' button. If someone is at the other terminal, whether it is in British Columbia or Berlin, you can exchange many messages in a short period of time. New users sometimes complain at the way messages from people they don't know start so informally with 'Hi' or the way a message simply starts as if it is completing a conversational turn without letter-like preliminaries. Very soon after a first message you will find people the other side of the world exchanging quite intimate information about themselves and they speculate on-screen about what you might be like. And then often the relationship will end as abruptly as it began. These are fluid, mobile couplings that rarely follow the modern narrative which leads to certificates of commitment or to joining the depths of each soul to another.

I've been talking mainly about email so far, but when you surf around the discussion groups and multi-user pages of the electronic net you are able to construct a persona, an 'avatar' as it is called in cyberpunk science fiction. In cyberspace a lot of science fiction is becoming true, and the new cyberpunk genre connects more directly than most science fiction with what is actually happening for a lot of people at the moment

in their encounters with technology. You can select others you want to interact with, and these others, remember, may have constructed a persona with a gender and sexual preferences quite different from those bodies actually at the end of the terminal, and you may then participate in a bizarre fantasy encounter that is as intense as if your bodies were touching.

Psychologists will often grant that desires are rather enigmatic and mutable things, and might be unperturbed by these goings on, but they do still like to think of cognitive processes as determinate and knowable. Not so in cyberspace. Not so, actually, it turns out, anywhere much outside the experimental cubicle, for studies on everyday and collective memory show that much of what we do we do with others, and we do it differently with different others and differently in different cultural settings. Cognitive resources and skills are not, mostly, inside the head but are distributed in complex networks of relationships. This is a point that Jean Lave, among others, has helped us to appreciate. This insight makes new work in systemic and narrative family therapy possible, and it is not surprising, perhaps, that some family therapists would like to go all the way in breaking from modern individualistic notions of pathology to something they see as more postmodern and located in the open systems of culture and discourse.

Now in cyberspace, as we log on and travel the network of networks we have access to information about everything. Not for nothing is the subtitle of Jean-François Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition*, 'A Report on Knowledge'. Lyotard's book was commissioned by the Canadian government to assess strategies for investment in new information technologies, and it characterises well the ways in which new forms of selfhood start to emerge in an environment in which we no longer have to collect and puzzle over bits of information. All the information we need and more, too much, is already there around us. And so the way we access memory changes because of the way memory is organised in this electronic environment.

And it doesn't stop there, for we now have a generation of 'cyberonauts' who return from this virtual space to describe new modes of interaction outside the electronic environment, in what they term, for example, 'reality hacking'. For these cyberselves, *this* world is as virtual as the electronic one, and the perception that this is so calls for new game rules to access it and change it. I guess it's not surprising that there should be such a sizeable crossover constituency of people who are into cyberspace and into designer drug culture, or that Timothy Leary, to take just one case, should now be evangelising about the interconnectedness of things through virtual reality. All material changes in production and technology breed forms of idealism. We need to understand how those forms have been produced, and we also need to understand what aliena-

ted needs are being expressed, as ideology and as resistance rooted in new forms of subjectivity.

Once upon a time there was a little space for progressive work in psychology in anthropological studies which demonstrated that Western models of the mind just did not apply to other cultures. These studies were often caught in the trap of exoticising other cultures as being closer to nature or of trying to make them catch up with modern civilization, but they did problematise what psychology thought it was doing when it gathered facts about behaviour and the mind. Now, in electronic virtual realities, we have a gigantic world-wide anthropological space that unravels each and every truth psychology found. There are new rules for being a person in cyberspace, and a new subjectivity. Earlier this year the Discourse Unit held a conference in Manchester which dubbed these new rules and new subjectivity, 'cyberpsychology'.

One of the advantages of 'cyberpsychology' is that instead of looking back to an imaginary romantic pre-modern time where the human self floated free, we can look forward to something *almost* postmodern where a new self is defined by new cultural rules. But we need to take care. On the one hand, cyberpsychology could become a fragmented, transgressive and more liberated way of reconstructing subjectivity that could teach us much about the rather fixed, limited and self-regulating selves we live in at the moment. It then breaks from traditional psychology, and promises a more empowering next fifty years than the last fifty. On the other hand, the increasing surveillance and censorship of cyberspace which is driven by attempts to turn this anarchic place into new territory for the so-called free market could turn it into a world which is the mirror-image of the world outside the net. It is quite possible for traditional psychologists to then turn electronic environments into all the more efficient and for that, all the more pernicious and oppressive regimes of observation. Cyberspace could be the ultimate fantasy world of prediction and control. There are no guarantees which way this could go.

So, here's the second version, my second glance into the future. Perhaps the picture I presented in that first cybervision was a little too passive. Perhaps I fell a little too easily into the traditional psychological way of looking at things as if so and so process would occur and then we had to choose from a set of limited options. One of the things we in Manchester have admired about Holzkamp's work is the way that his critical-reflective work in psychology was tied to practical activity in the 1960s, and the way Critical Psychology was closely identified with the radical movements inside and outside the academic world. Traditional psychologists all too often tell us that *this* is the way the world is, this is the way people are, this is what can and cannot be done, as if they knew. But they don't. And many of the people they do things to know they don't. What are we to make of this? Rather than try to solve this problem as if it were merely an internal matter, surely psychologists should

do something to rearrange the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the discipline. Indeed, that sort of thing is already happening.

Let me give you two examples. To experience 'auditory hallucinations' is to display, according to psychiatrists and most psychologists, a first rank symptom of schizophrenia. A less insulting description of the phenomenon is to say that someone is 'hearing voices'. It is treated as a pathology. Yet there will be many people in this room who hear voices. It is sometimes frightening when the voices start appearing, yet it seems that the biggest fear is the fear of going mad, or what will happen if a psychiatrist finds out. Now there is a movement of people, some of whom have been through the psychiatric system, called the 'Hearing Voices Network' which developed first in The Netherlands, and then in the UK. What the Hearing Voices Network does is to bring people together to share their experiences of coping with the voices if they cannot shake them off or celebrating the voices if they find them helpful. At a Discourse Unit meeting in July over 150 people came together to talk about their *theories* of voice hearing. One of the extraordinary things at that day, something that I had expected, was that we would hear a variety of explanations richer and more empowering than a battery of psychological tests. We had philosophers and physicists, spiritualists and shamans, mathematical explanations and telepathic explanations. There was one nice deconstructive paper, this by a psychologist, which analysed transcripts of doctor-patient interviews to illustrate how the doctor diagnosing schizophrenia must have 'heard voices', heard the voices of science telling him that he was right. The overall feeling of the day was that this was a place where people who heard voices were being listened to, and they had things to say. The other thing that did surprise me a bit, especially when I think of student anxiety about giving seminars, not to mention my own, was that near on thirty people who had never presented an academic paper in their lives could prepare an abstract and turn up and give a coherent account in a lecture theatre. What this 'festival of explanations' did was to provide a space for the elaboration of alternative accounts of experience, new forms of subjectivity which resist variable-psychology.

There is much understandable suspicion of psy-complex would-be experts and engineers among users of services. In August last year there was a major international conference in Maastricht of the 'Hearing Voices Network'. One of the key activists, a voice hearer, held up a Dutch bag of sugar he had found in a supermarket. It was called 'Bastard', and he suggested that it would be a good present for people to take home to their psychiatrists.

I mentioned earlier on that there are nice psychologists. The work of Holzkamp is testimony to the fact that psychologists can be critical and progressive. But the peculiar thing is, if you look around the world at the activities of psychologists involved in action research with people in

psychiatric services in Holland or Italy, or educational research with the poor in Brazil or El Salvador, you find that the good things they are doing are often *not* psychology. In Italy, for example, the psychologists who used to work in the old mental hospital of San Giovanni in the city of Trieste now do the gardening or serve food in the community cafe. In El Salvador the social psychologists, such as Ignacio Martin-Baró, who were murdered by the army in 1989, were a threat because they were acting out what is called in liberation theology 'a preferential option for the poor' and their survey work was in the service of the oppressed, not for the accumulation of psychological knowledge.

Let me give you a second example of the types of things psychologists could do that would be in the spirit of that empowering work. There was a speaker, that same speaker as it happens, from the Hearing Voices Network at the founding conference in Manchester last year of a new group which brings together psychologist and users of psychology services. We also had guest speakers from prison psychology in Barcelona, educational psychology in Sarajevo, and anti-apartheid social psychology in Cape Town. The group is called 'Psychology Politics Resistance', PPR, and it now has a mailing list of over five hundred people. A group meets regularly in London, and there is a PPR women's group. The *Times Higher Education Supplement* reporting the conference said that PPR wanted to set up campus meetings to encourage students to challenge the psychology degree syllabus. That isn't a bad idea, but the group is both a little more modest and more ambitious than that. PPR does not aim to replace the myriad of self-help groups and campaigns that provide alternatives to traditional psychology, and which already challenge hetero-sexism or racism in psychological theory or practice. Rather, it aims to link them and provide a resource to support people inside and outside psychology so that, at the very least, they are not isolated. PPR does try to rework the relationship between 'experts' and 'users' in the discipline so that the abuse of power in psychology is challenged.

Now, I should finish by saying that although PPR is building an electronic database of people from progressive psychology and activist groups, and we do hope to launch this database into cyberspace as a resource, cyberpsychology is, at the moment, the least of its concerns. What PPR is doing, and its by no means the only such initiative, is building something that is empowering and transformative.

I've sketched out a cybervision of the future, but whether that is accurate or not, we also need a political vision. Whatever happens to psychology in the next century, whether is to be another capitalist century or not, will depend on what we do now. One of the things psychologists should be doing now is looking to the future alongside people who use psychology. I think that would make all the difference, and would be in the spirit of the Critical Psychology movement Klaus Holzkamp helped to build.