

Governing by process. Post-cybernetic therapeutics in work and education

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Para-therapeutic practices of consulting and coaching have accompanied industrialization by fostering a rationalization and standardization of lifestyles and working habits. The fordist production regime with its reformist welfare politics had firmly established these techniques as part of the governmental agenda, and postindustrialism has altered the media and the meanings of such social technologies.

Recent changes in the mode of societal production associated with the assumed rise of a knowledge society in the post-industrial north renewed diverse societal interest in means suited to increasing inventive capabilities in the workspace. Neo-marxist (Voß/Pongratz 1998, Moldaschl), Weberian (Boltanski 2003) and Foucauldian analyses (Rose 1998, Bröckling 2002) converge in the assumption that a regime of subjectivity arranged around the notion of an 'enterprising self' and 'project work' has been established as the centerpiece of a postfordist/neoliberal governmentality. The therapeutics supporting the enterprising self have been implemented in the workplace, welfare counseling, the educational system, adult education, and vocational training. Accordingly, it has been stated that the body politics and biopolitics of pre-20th century have been supplemented by a 'psy-politics' and an 'anthropo-politics' (Rose 1998).

In a study on the development of therapeutic practices which lead to contemporary 'organizational development' and 'coaching', I have found that media technologies, alternative therapeutics and management theories have been fused into a distinct social technology. The materiality and the topoi of this therapeutic discourse are informed by cybernetics: it provides metaphors and communication techniques that have been woven into the coaching and consulting practices of the 'new professionals' (Kellner/Berger 1992). Within the knowledge of 'cybernetic anthropology' (Rieger 2003), a biological model of life is applied to technologies of control and vice versa, establishing an ontological concern for the future of individuals, organizations, and societies. This 'controlled future' is infused with the promise of

augmented self-enjoyment (Whitehead 1966, Deleuze 1995). Self-enjoyment in this context, however is only to be achieved by subjecting oneself to a regime of techniques based on a specialized conception of subjectivity: visions are to be developed, goals have to be set, potentials can be unleashed, obstacles should be identified and overcome, environments have to be negotiated. Based on notions of transience, mobility and flexibility, this post-narrative identity requires and allows for ongoing self-documentation to relevant gatekeepers. A consideration of media as technology, as metaphor and as knowledge can expand the notions of subjectivation and sociality which are proposed by traditional social constructivisms: subject formation in the information age is mediated not only symbolically, but also iconically, 'digitally' and by networked environments (cf. Castels 1996). My study shows that a 'c-politics' (cybernetics, coaching, consultation), bearing resemblance to, yet differing from psy-politics, has emerged, which thrives on promises of increased degrees of freedom and vitality for individual lives, of a rational and just 'placement' of experiences and capabilities on markets, and of a (capitalist) culture of innovation embodied in subjective and organizational processes.

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