



## Letter from the Editor



### ***A Semiology of Capitalism & the Pursuit of Reflection for a Future Psychoanalysis: Remarks***

The theme of the EPIS conference this year involves the natural & indigenous roots of a progressive psychoanalysis, applied phenomenology, and anthropologically transformative critical theory. Some of our papers this summer address this directly; others indirectly, but all contribute to the whole.

While looking to past theories in psychoanalysis and phenomenology is important, this conference will focus on new, creative ideas, concepts, and theories. The goal is to produce presentations and papers that explore innovative work in psychoanalysis and phenomenology that refer to natural and indigenous roots of our civilization and cultures within it.

Our hope is to produce papers that explore alienated relationships between the living world, life, and the given, and our



contemporary understanding of psychoanalysis and phenomenology. This involves, necessarily, critical theory, applied phenomenology, praxis, and potentials for transformative change, individually and collectively.

In short, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and critical theory are useful discourses that can tell us who we are, who others are, and how we see self, other, and world. However, much of psychoanalysis has not fairly treated these larger structural factors, like capitalism, like the semiology of capitalism (and production). I am suggesting that this conference theme is to encourage good thinking and good papers on how we can DO phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and critical theory within a dominant metaphor or discourse - which is a semiology of capitalism. I think there is plenty of evidence that demonstrates we prioritize this metaphor over ALL others, including the value of life, culture, etc. I am suggesting that we need to pay close attention to how these STRUCTURAL factors, including dominant metaphors and dominant discourses, affect our very ability to DO psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and critical theory. That brings me to my questions concerning reflection in the introduction. I think the questions are important. By postulating a hermeneutics of suspicion in which we cannot fully trust what our mind thinks or how we reflect, we might be able to navigate to a truer level of reflection, a reflection that provides more truth or insight about the nature of humans beings. Humanism is in a mal-mentalized, chaotic tension right now. As such, humanism as we know it - in my view - must be transformed radically into something very different. This means we must transform our anthropology. I believe that we cannot do this and continue to be inebriated with what we think of as individualism or autonomy...for God's sake, deep discourses provide the matrix of all practical thinking positions...our choices just a semblance of freedom...Thus, we must interrogate reflection. We must bracket what we think of as reflection — both you and I - and others - and re-think reflection in a way that sidesteps desire, which is at the very heart of classical and contemporary psychoanalysis....

We are concerned here with subjectivization—the topological cultural space within which we become selves. This necessarily triggers a dialectic between voluntarism and structuralism; our possibility for self-constitution; and the power exogenous forces have on this dynamic interplay.



It seems clear that we are structuralized by semio-capitalism—that the overarching semiology concerns capitalism, accumulation, and commodification as the main hermeneutic allocation of value in our politics and culture. Within this hermeneutic, some examples of subjectivity include the faithful, the obscure, the reactive, the anxious, the violent, the complacent, the courageous, the responsible, the just, and those who seek solidarity. These terms, of course, transverse taxonomies such as the DSM, and therefore have the meaningful resources of several discourses and domains. But they all tangle with truth and goodness and are, therefore, subject to a psycho-analysis.

We see

in this semio-space the potential further erosion of the fictions of autonomy and individualism given that choices and perceived freedom are already pre-structured. Thus, what appears as a set of free choices by a unique individual is already constrained by a homogenous-homologous structure that exists both unconsciously and consciously within the situation and context of these choices. Therefore, we must consider that the brain and the mind are plastic and can, therefore, be affected and shaped by the mental environment. This is the cultural, political, and social situation along with its domains such as the neuro-electric and the neuro-physical. These exogenous forces create neurological limits to the brain and derivatively, limits to the imagination.

In contemporary culture, we are seeing the profound structural and self-constituting effects of the violent penetration of capitalist exploitation into Internet technology, government, bureaucracy, corporations, multiple social and cultural domains, and individual bodies. It also affects the topology and matrices of self-structure that presence themselves in human communities. Currently, this onslaught of capitalist violence causes noospheric chaos, de-mentalizations, fragmentations, and splitting between emotion and cognition. In order to help us adjust to these conditions, psychiatry and psychopharmacology re-program and mollify the effects of this capitalist violence. This re-programming minimizes singularity, which is the uniqueness of each person, transforming it into the homogenous structure that prefigures what we perceive as individual and free. This, in turn, supports our neurotic subjectivizations and obsessions to capital and the ensuing neural exploitation. This is the submission of our minds to a semiology of capitalism.



Unfortunately, these capitalist formations disengage our existential experience from deeper cultural and social meaning, for example, by separating the humanities from science, the technical from the social, or the cultural from the natural. This distorts and narrows our noetic—our source of meaning—to one that is circumscribed and mediated by accumulation and growth, possession and control. The acquisition of knowledge thus becomes a teleological enterprise of assimilating and learning capitalist ideologies and dogmas. In principle, if we do not understand these foundations then what we perceive as critical thinking and reflection is instead a mass manipulation through power and the way it utilizes language.

Because capitalism becomes the chief semiological fulcrum, we lose the authentic relation to the environment and all the life and being in it. This creates fragmentation and alienation most deeply experienced as a temporal dystonia because the way capital forces us into an experience of time distorts an ordinary, natural relation to it. This raises the issue of our human anthropology and our relation to the cosmos. Currently, we operate primarily from humanism, in which a) humans believe that they are more ontologically valuable than other life forms and b) humans compete with each other for important goods, and in so doing elevate capitalism and competition above all other values. This creates a valorization of autonomy, individualism, competition, evolution, acquisition, narcissism, and egocentrism, which becomes an unbridled violence contextualized in automation — we have become automatons. This leads to an eventual interrogation of the human anthropology and our most basic interpretational structures—our noetic—how we see the world. This opens transcendent space in which we can choose to re-define ourselves and shift the source of meaning away from semio-capitalism and all that I have been discussing.

Let us now consider some other dimensions of this problem—what we see that is happening. As we recall, it was not so long ago that the western culture viewed humans as mechanisms. In this schema, we are products of nature, live in space-time interpreted as calculable motion, are embodied, and are controlled by the laws of nature. This is, as I have discussed elsewhere, the borrowing of principles of physics and applying them to human beings. This tends to squeeze out the historical, and the self-constituting aspect in our humanity. What is left is



a different sort of temporality that is less based on cultural and social meaning that is free from technology, and that is more based on a de-humanized evolutionary approach that prioritizes power, competition, and other values that emanate from a mechanistic type of humanism.

Thus,  
the perception of time also shifts in semio-capitalism. Consider that humans have a deep existential capacity for

temporality with past, present, and future ekstases.

We then layer our historical, cultural, social, and personal interpretations of time on this deep existential structure and ontological faculty. This involves the relation between the ontological and the ontic, but it is important to note that these interpretations structure our thinking and our lives from a deep place. However, if we de-prioritize life, then the historical, cultural, social, and personal are thereby distorted. Instead of temporality being governed by important cultural factors, it is now largely governed by time interpreted as efficiency, productivity, and capitalism. It shifts from the lifeworld to automation; or another way of articulating this is to say that the lifeworld is now completely dominated by semio-capitalism.

Because of our assumptions of neuro-plasticity and neuro-totalitarianism, we can safely become concerned that our structure of temporality has its foundation in a semiology of capitalism. This can conflict with natural life rhythms, historical processes, and human integration with the rest of the Earth. Because these structures are both unconscious and conscious, they affect our very perceptions of them. One concern I have is whether we have any transcendental space left within which to imagine other time-worlds—other interpretations of temporality. Without this critical space, we lack an important thinking dimension of our relationship with the rest of existence—other life forms and the resources of the Earth. Another concern is that with an interpretation of time based on mechanism and automation, we lose the idea of duration. We lose the richness of a life that understands the difference between past, present, and future, and the temporal ekstases of retention, intention, and protention, which allow us a deeper level of introspection and moral consciousness.

Furthermore, in a mechanistic interpretation of temporality, in which time is viewed as motion and space, we prioritize operational thinking which also suppresses deeper thinking about the construction of meaning.



In addition, with time being compressed by the need for productivity and efficiency, there is less time to consider transcendence and change. Thus, there is less capacity for deeper thinking and the consideration of meaning formation.

Let's take stock. We are facing the issues of time, the nature of our human anthropology or authenticity, thinking, meaning, and a topology of the self, separable concepts, to be sure, but all highly inter-related in psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and critical theory. Now that we have mentioned both temporality and the nature of the human anthropology, let's focus on authenticity, self-structure, and the origin of meaning. Currently, our anthropology is centered on an egology, narcissism, and the possessory self of the Western Enlightenment, which I have written about extensively. In this introduction, however, I want to tie it to an apprehension and experience of the Other and of the given—the given Other. Let's discuss that self because it is present at these three disciplines that we study and utilize at the Existential Psychoanalytic Institute & Society.

In a civilization that is governed by a semiology of capitalism, consumption, and desire—historically contextualized with a valorization of the fictions of individualism and autonomy—the self is an alienated, isolated structure. To be sure, it is inter-relationally constituted, but in its hubris, it forgets how essential the Other is to its very self-constitution. In this way of being, it sees the world only in terms of its own mental categories; thus, everything is a projection. What it perceives comes from its own mind and therefore not from the world as it is given. Unfortunately, we lose apprehension, experience, and understanding of the Other—who is a radical Other.

We can see that semio-capitalism is a derivative of a metaphysics that attempts to quantify nature then hypostatize it into what we consider to be original reality. In this worldview, even the subject of the subject-object split is reified into a thing—which then becomes subject to an anthropology of mechanism, as I have explained. Modern science fails to inquire into the mode of being of its objects. Here, their meaning is constricted to a picture of the facts, i.e., to no effective meaning at all. Further, there is no meaning in general; it is always meaning for [someone]. Thus, the question of meaning is a study in reflection, which leads us to an examination of reflection itself.



If a semiology of capitalism is based on a subjectivity of desire, it follows that the kind of reflection this sort of subject is capable of would be conditioned by that very desire, or self-interest. Thus, the very topology or structure of the self operates as a set of world parameters within which reflection occurs. More strongly, reflection tends toward self-interest at this level. I argue that self-interest often brings closure to availability and closure to deeper and broader reflection. Thus, when personal interest conflicts with reflection in some way, reflection is at risk for being suppressed or distorted. This is true, of course, unless there is a different kind of reflection, one that is more radical in that it interrogates the attachment we have to our self-interest. Therefore, is it not the case that the reflective self takes its own interest to task? That it thinks against itself? Doesn't the virtue of responsibility require us to place full attention on the task of reflection itself? Doesn't this full attention require us to bracket our very own interests and desires as we probe into the transcendent field from which they arise? Without this deeper level of reflection, we cannot be sure that any sort of reflection outstrips self-interest.

This countermove of reflection exposes our capacity for freedom and derivatively for moral autonomy and choice. Being able to step back from a purely egologically-formed self-structure exposes our capacity for transcendence, transformation, and change. Sartre spoke of this as “pure reflection”—pure because it exposes the self-deception involved in usual ego structure. More clearly, we often close ourselves to things and others by not engaging in this purifying thought process and by staying within our “desirous reflections.”

Unfortunately, this means that we create an opaque relationship to reality and do not see or experience things as they really are. One can easily see the moral, epistemological, and other ramifications of this distortive process. The countermove trends toward a different kind of reflection—and truth. This countermove trends toward truth because it opens to the world of others and to things, instead of closing itself to them.

Let us go further in asking about the purpose of reflection. Is it not to correct the distortions and falsities of what appears?



For example, I might consider that the way I see things is, in principle, distorted because of my self-interest. Conversely, isn't it true that reflection gives us an opportunity to see past the distortions to reach what is given? This is not being as such; rather, it is what is given in a way that transcends our personal desires. Doesn't this possibility require a responsibility to transcend our personal interests, as Patocka suggests? Doesn't this also require us to live in and entertain the realm of the possible, such realm the future ekstases of a conscious, aware human being? Doesn't this therefore require us to consider all temporal ekstases and how they relate to one another as source of meaning and context for future choice? Let's take stock. We have on one hand a self that splits its own being into subject and object, mediated by its own interests and desires; on the other, we have a self that opens itself to the world in an originary way, separate and apart from its own desire. These are two self-structures that have radically different topological-metaphysical structures. One is authentic and consonant with the reality of givenness; the other is self-deceptive and guided by self-interest.

The kind of radical reflection we seek involves this radical opening of ourselves in the first instance. Perhaps this is through Socratic ignorance; perhaps it is through a choice of availability in experience that includes the epistemological. This is a kind of self-choice that is interested in the given. This is the givenness of beings present in situation. Morally and psychologically, this is experience without fear and anxiety; existentially, it is experience without temporality, which includes an understanding of the multiple-worlds thesis, and a presence at the seat of the formation of worlds and time. It simply means to be fully present in the lifeworld—to the given—and most importantly, to be without self-interest. Let's clarify. What this means is that we can methodically attain an experience in consciousness that overcomes an alienation between the human and the world. We do this by correcting the subject-object dichotomy, and by purifying ourselves of the distortions and self-deceptions of our ego. This requires us to distance ourselves from our ego, while simultaneously creating proximity with the given. This offers us a new Archimedean point, which I will address shortly, which discloses our inter-relationship with all things; and which opens a greater disclosure of the phenomenological field. This is phenomenology.

A problem emerges, however. In completely-purified reflection, we may lose the self as center and locus of moral autonomy and responsibility. As Patocka argues, reflection is dialectical, which attempts to mediate between two extremes. On the one hand, if we are





totally alienated from nature because of a possessory, dominating self, then we surely miss the given. On the other, if we are totally merged with nature then we lose the integrity of the self, and therefore our ability to engage in critical thought. This is the critical thought about nature and our place within it; about the transcendental regime that determines how nature is given to us; about other worlds from which the given presences; about the way we allow such presencing in a way that transcends our personal desire and interest. This involves the relation between how we understand the given and how we understand our very self. In this understanding—which is subjective reflection—we attempt to understand ourselves, which is our search for authentic self. At the same time, we attempt to understand the Other in his being. This means we acknowledge the difference. Thus, to the extent we do not understand our essential nature, our human anthropology, we do not understand the Other except in distorted ways, which are often a product of anxiety, fear, and violence.

This means that we must seek a form of resoluteness and responsibility to our own self-understanding and moral development, coincidental with our inter-relationship to all Others. The search of an authentic self lies in that dialectical process of inter-relationship but not just with other humans. It must be with all Others, human and non-human, in order to move beyond our egocentrism and our anthro-centrism. Further, this means that the quest must not just be an outward study of the objective; instead, it must focus inward, on our very noetic structure and our own consciousness of how and to what extent we are presencing in this world, in this situation. It is this author's view that the primary semiological signifier is capitalism, along with its self-topological structure. It is this primary signifier that must be overcome and transcended and replaced by a signifier of life and its presencing. Methodologies toward this goal include phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and critical theory—purified from a semiology of capitalism and a noetic architecture of the possessory, acquisitive self. This is the self that pursues a fiction of autonomy and individualism at the ontic level, while not understanding that her choices have been pre-determined by that very noetic and semiological structure. Thus, it is an opportunity for radical reflection, free from both personal desire and interest, and from a semiology that pre-structures what counts as valuable and good.

This brings us to an important intersection in this



thinking as it addresses that most important distinction between description and understanding. Is it possible to arrive at an un-interpreted apprehension or experience of the common world of things and Others? If not originary, is it possible to make approximations of this region of awareness through dialectical bracketing procedures? Keep in mind this would require an imaginary process of moving between a scientific view and a purified, translucent consciousness in which this very view is held in suspension, so it can be examined. Let's now take a case in which we can employ this thinking.

Years ago, I wrote a book entitled *Vivantonomy: A Trans-Humanist Phenomenology of the Self* which is a good example of this bracketing process, in which we set aside a particular worldview—in this case a deep worldview—in order to examine it and consider other options. In this case, I bracket and challenge western humanism, with its unique anthropology that is structure by capitalism and competition, which serves and supports a self-structure that is possessory and acquisitive, dominating, and egocentric. This can be articulated in the languages of critical theory, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology each with its own lexicon. For our immediate quest, we want to know what lies at the bottom of the worldviews of autonomy, heteronomy, and vivantonomy, each an inter-relational position with respect to the Other. Both heteronomy and vivantonomy (which is the prioritization of life over purely humanist, self-centered approaches we see in individualism) challenge competition, individualism, capitalism as primary values, and substitute in others that support the Other. In the case of heteronomy, this is the other human. In the case of vivantonomy, this is all sentient Others, both human and non-human. The idea of trans-humanism means to transcend only the interests of humans, and instead, treat equally with ontological equity, all living sentient beings, and all life in general.

The general principles in *Vivantonomy* that challenge humanism are: 1) that we must not perceive the ontological worth of non-humans to be lower than that of the worth of humans; 2) that we must take responsibility for much deeper an integrated knowledge about the whole of all ecosystems; 3) that we choose a new Archimedean point in which we do not believe that we are at the center of the earth or any universe and that all beings have equal interests and rights that must always be considered; 4) that we recognize



all life comes from the same source and that we must commit to solidarity with all life; 5) that we deepen our responsibility and commitment to all Others both human and non-human, and the life environment; and 6) that we work diligently to develop a new human anthropology, source of meaning and noetic, and reality principle. This is the work of psychoanalysis, critical theory, and phenomenology.

We can see that this new view—with the individual and collective foci of vivantonomy and trans-humanism—challenges a semiology of capitalism and its correlates like autonomy, individualism, competition, power over others, possessory and acquisitive programs—all these indicia of western individualism and humanism. By its very nature this view challenges a primary semiology of capitalism. By framing an exploration into the natural & indigenous roots of a progressive psychoanalysis, applied phenomenology, and anthropologically transformative critical theory we thereby create that dialectical space that challenges the current mainstream framework of these disciplines, especially but not only in a clinical sense.

Our hope is to generate ideas that explore those relationships between the living world, life, and the given that are attributable to a semiology of capitalism, through our contemporary understanding of psychoanalysis, critical theory, and phenomenology, as mediated by their indigenous and natural roots. This is not naturalism per se, but involves the question of how we frame an understanding of nature and the natural in terms of these discourses and substantive orientations. This involves, necessarily, praxis, and potentials for transformative change, individually and collectively.

Ultimately, we are in pursuit of the relationship between the self and its projection of the objective—as subject. This is the phenomenon of subjectivization, which can be known psychoanalytically and phenomenologically, even with an over-arching semio-capitalism.

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