

# Trading in the self

Once upon a time, in the early part of the twentieth century, there were such things as factory production, time-and-motion studies, the Hawthorne Effect, Taylorism and Fordism, in fact, a whole panoply of techniques for turning workers into mere objects of knowledge, for turning persons into tools of the production process, and so forth. These things are sometimes referred to as scientific management. Today, this scientific management has a bad name. And probably rightly so. Scientific management traded in the self and, in the trading, transformed it into a machine for tending other machines, with precise calculations of its energy outputs and the time it required to generate a given unit of work. But today, so the story goes, we can work at our own pace, from home if we choose; we are autonomous selves beyond the measure of the stopwatch and the clipboard. Today, to continue the story, we are supposedly task-based and object-oriented. No scientific calculation appears to mark the timing of our labour — so long as the appointed task is completed and the nominated object produced.

Plausible as it may be, what this story fails to acknowledge is that the scientific management of *production*, so prevalent in the early days of the twentieth century, has been displaced by a new scientific management of *consumption*. The early twentieth century had no television or other broadcast media, no global advertising, no mass distribution of specialist magazines and Internet sites and, to all intents and purposes, no popular psychology. At the time, the new-fangled domain of psychological help was the preserve of the rich and leisured classes. While factory workers had their every bodily movement measured and calculated, those who derived their wealth from industry could afford sufficient time and money to invest in self-analysis. They had the luxury of being allowed not only to *have* an interiority but also to have it analysed and corrected. But with the move from the positioning of the 'ordinary person' as producer to her respecification as *consumer*, attention shifted from the scientific management of the external body to the scientific management of the internal self, the mind. And the new science of psychology took over as the relevant toolkit for doing this. Today, psychology is the primary discipline on which this new scien-

tific management of the self depends.<sup>1</sup>

Nikolas Rose, who coined the term 'psy-complex' (Rose, 1985) and on whose path-breaking research much of this book depends, marks this change to late modernity as follows:<sup>2</sup>

television, advertising, magazines, newspapers, shop windows — the signs and images of the good life were inscribed on every surface that could carry their imprint. The new technologies of citizenship formation were to gain their power through subjective commitments and ways of life that were generated by the technique of choice and consumption. (Rose, 1990: 227)

'Choice and consumption', then, are not the mere 'lifestyle' luxuries that they once were for the middle classes who benefitted from early capitalist forms of production. Rather, they are ways of anchoring what Rose calls 'the new technologies of citizenship'. The citizen, nowadays, is she who correctly and properly lays bare her soul to suitably ratified professionals, ensuring supposedly proper mental hygiene throughout the population. The new economy of consumption absolutely requires this. So it is now our civic duty to invite TV ratings polls into our lives; to attend GP check-ups of our emotional, sexual and dietary habits; to fill in magazine quizzes which will tell us the 'true nature' of our sexualities; to be prescribed complex psychotropic drugs such as antidepressants; to log on to the Internet and make our inner feelings known to collectors of psychological data; to call phone help-lines catering to remedies for a panoply of late-modern 'conditions' from child abuse to eating disorders; to read pamphlets from government and voluntary agencies designed to cope with everything from parenting to psychosis; to enter 'competitions' so that marketing companies can register and tabulate our consumer preferences. And so on, through myriad forms of citizenship technologies.

Today, all of this is 'normal'. To refuse is to render oneself beyond official commercial citizenship, beyond help from the new scientific regimes that always appear to be 'for' the individual (you!) but which, at the same time, are the bedrock of the economic formation of post-productionist consumer calculation. In effect, the 'commodity' is no longer something you produce during your working day; rather it is you yourself. The self itself has become commoditised, so that this very self is now the basic traded commodity.

For example, why is it that what you pay for your morning news-

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1. We use the terms 'psychology', 'psychiatry' and 'psy' interchangeably throughout this book, in the same way as Nikolas Rose (1985) uses the term 'psy-complex' to refer to all of the disciplines that concern themselves with 'mental health'.

2. We are grateful to Danielle Gallegos for unearthing this passage from Rose, and several other aspects of the shift to the late-modern and the consuming self noted in this chapter. See Gallegos (2002).

paper is much less than the actual value of the material paper you are purchasing? Say your Sunday paper costs £1.30, but the sheer volume of paper would, elsewhere, cost you more than £5.00. The reason for this apparently strange economy is this: you are not 'buying' your newspaper. Rather, its owners are selling *you* to their advertisers. The cover price you so willingly pay each morning is no more than a bonus, an occasional windfall for the decreasing pool of global media owners. In short, the consuming self is now the world economy's fundamental commodity. Is this a paradox? Yes and no, but mostly yes — especially from the point of view of the consumer herself. Hence the intervention of a discipline pre-established to both produce and deal with such structurally problematic selves.

So, central to this structural condition is the nexus between the official science of the self, psychology, and marketing. To all intents and purposes, 'applied psychology' *is* mostly marketing. As well as providing expert advice to the producers of game shows and 'reality' TV programmes, applied psy assists in, for example, advertising strategies: attempting to specify the psychological profiles of the various demographics of consumption. But this is only part of the story. At the same time, and because the consuming self is now the dominant version of the self for governmental purposes, psychological techniques of self-assessment, monitoring and surveillance are now important commodities in their own right. In fact, they may be considered *the* meta-commodity par excellence: for the dominant psychological techniques of governing populations at large have now become popular commodities actively sought and purchased by the individuals making up those populations.

This is, no doubt, a fabulous opportunity for suitably qualified professionals — in either for-profit, private practice or in what remains of socialised health care systems such as Britain's NHS — and perhaps explains the increasing popularity of university psychology courses. These new professionals can cash in their expertise, aiding an increasingly anxious clientele and, at the same time, wipe their hands of any calumny, knowing that their services are precisely definitive of what constitutes the official contemporary social 'good'. Much more so if, as in the UK's NHS, no filthy lucre actually changes hands and the practitioner is handsomely paid by the state. Indeed British psy-practitioners may feel that this arrangement relieves them from the odious charge of a vested interest in the suffering of others, of profiting from their pain. But such a belief is merely a self-serving delusion. When mortgages, new cars, foreign holidays, professional (doctoral) status and all the other trappings of a comfortable middle-class lifestyle depend upon sustaining the endless flow of clientele, then a direct pecuniary interest is at stake.<sup>3</sup> And this is to leave the

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3. UK Department of Health data suggest that the average NHS psychologist's salary is £32,000 a year, with consultant psychologists being paid up to ...

cash benefits of waiting-list initiatives to one side. NHS practitioners may not — yet — engage in the sharp practices of their resolutely commercial American peers that we document later in this book but, after all, they have no need to. Thus while most UK psy-professionals may, on a charitable reading, have only an *indirect* material interest in maximising suffering, in endlessly expanding the forms of misery held to require their assistance, in increasing the numbers of people queuing at their NHS doors, they certainly have little incentive to publicly identify the emperor's state of undress. Thus, although we may be used to hearing popular complaints about, for example, commercial TV stations being licenced to print money, few level the same charge against the psy-professions. They appear benign — even beneficent — as they go about the routine business of the new scientific management of trade in the self.

The purpose of this book is to lift the lid on this trade. Chapter two introduces some of the basic facts and figures that characterise the commercial psychological scene today. For example, mental health care has been estimated to be a \$70 billion industry in the US alone (Dunaway, 2000). In 1892, the American Psychological Association had 31 members; by the year 2000, this had extended to 83,096 (APA, 2002). Ten million Americans are treated with anti-psychotic drugs every year (*Colors*, 2001/2002: 100). Much the same is true for the UK and Australia. Here, despite the differences in types of provision, in both the British NHS and in Australia's public and private systems, psy-practitioners report overwhelming demand for their wares. So much so that Britain's 3,500 NHS clinical psychologists are seriously contemplating the need for an increase in their number to 17,000. Perhaps in consequence of this flood of need, MIND reported that, between January and March 1999, 2,800 people in the UK received 'about 16,500' administrations of ECT, supposedly a treatment of last resort (MIND, 2002). How has this explosion of need come about? What is so attractive to consumers about their own pathologisation by the psy-professions and the drug companies, as well as a range of allied agencies and trades? We speculate that the motto of this age of psychologisation is, in fact, 'I want, therefore I am' — that there is a new and emergent discourse of the consumption of ourselves *as our selves*.

Chapter three begins by discussing two recent and crucial changes to the regulations by which psychologists are permitted to trade. In *Pax Americana*, these presage that which is to come on a global scale. The ethical changes in question are those ordered by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and the American Psychological Association's (APA) subsequent erasure of the long-standing prohibition against

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...£64,000. In Australian terms these are astronomic figures, with most public sector psychologists earning in the region of \$40–50,000. Our thanks to Craig Newnes for these figures.

providing psychological services outside the context of professional relationships (especially through the media). Briefly: in 1988, the FTC found portions of the APA's 'Ethical Standards of Psychologists' to be illegal restraints of trade. The offending sections restricted the content of advertising and other public statements intended to represent the desirability of services. The APA was ordered to amend its standards on 16 December 1992. The order lifted APA prohibitions against 'truthful advertising' that presented comparisons between services, claims to provide unique services, appeals to emotions or fears, and personal testimonials. In this chapter, we examine excerpts from professional publications and the popular press to provide an historical overview of the professionalisation of psychology and of recent changes to the (permissible) relationships between psy-practitioners, the media and the ordinary consumer.

Our fourth chapter addresses what is sometimes called 'bibliotherapy': the use of manuals and self-help books to promote mental hygiene. Since 1859, with the first publication of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*, these manuals have become a multi-billion-dollar industry worldwide. What is this burgeoning phenomenon? Part of the secret to the success of the genre is that it counts on psychological help being 'intimate' or 'private'. That is, the last thing readers want, even if they are constantly called upon to do so, is to air their worries and concerns to a broad public and that to do so may count as a disorder in its own right, a kind of psychological hypochondria. As the number of official afflictions ('illnesses', 'syndromes' and 'disorders') has grown, particularly since the 1980s, the market for privately finding the self — and, of course, finding the self *wanting* — has expanded accordingly. In this chapter, then, we look at this historical connection between 'therapy' and the 'privacy' of reading and examine the discursive means by which such popular 'recognition effects' can be brought off by reference to a transcribed discussion between best-selling self-help book writers.

The first part of chapter five explores the arrival and exponential growth of pop self-help texts in cyberspace. Self-help sites are amongst the most popular destinations on the world wide web (excluding pornography sites) and are effectively an interactive short form of the paper-based genre. They too offer 'privacy' of reading, but with the possibility of supposedly anonymous interaction with others seeking to 'find themselves'. A number of self-help websites facilitate entry into a virtual 'community' as a form of extra, free, 'assistance' (group therapy with the comfort of limited self-identification) — users who gather either in themed chatrooms (on, for example, 'co-dependency', 'emotional abuse', 'shyness', 'stress', 'parenting' and 'workaholism') or who are linked through asynchronous email discussion lists.

Upwards of 110 million people seek health-related information on the Internet each year. Of this number, the largest group is comprised of people seeking mental-health-related information. The sec-

ond part of chapter five therefore attends to three instances of the 'professional' psychological site: information sites providing searchable information on common and emergent 'psychological disorders'; test sites, offering interactive 'psychological' testing services (with automated feedback); and therapy sites furnishing a series of electronically-mediated treatment options (with real-life therapists). Often, such sites are linked in a strategy designed to move users from a new awareness of the possibility that they are 'disordered'; to a series of interactive tests which may confirm their 'diagnosis' (of 'sex addiction' for instance); to an appropriate therapy site, where a range of (on- and off-line) treatment options is presented, most often on a profit-oriented, fee-for-service basis.

Chapter six turns to one official/semi-official and one semi-official/unofficial source of pop psych dissemination and (in some cases) propaganda: the information pamphlet and the popular magazine. We begin by analysing the rhetorical dimensions of 'informational' and other packaging materials in the promotion of a designedly consumer-friendly version of 'mental health'. The focal materials here are information leaflets about 'psychological problems' produced for distribution in GPs' surgeries and pharmacies by the professional and voluntary sectors of the psy-complex. They include texts aimed at broadening lay understandings of 'schizophrenia', 'bipolar disorder', 'depression' and 'anti-psychotic medications' among numerous other topical questions in the domain of (roughly) 'mental health'.

Following this, in the second part of the chapter, we examine the 'problem page' and its recent avatars, standard features of a wide range of popular magazines with target readerships as diverse as those encompassed by *Woman's Own*, *Cleo/Cosmopolitan* and *Reader's Digest*. Here, we address the psychologisation and individualisation of 'problems' in these texts. In particular we focus on the progression in the 'professionalisation' of these pages (via the changes in ascribed status of the putative advice-giving 'respondent') and also on the progressive lowering of the threshold for 'referral' to psychological experts, and the simultaneous broadening of the category of difficulties that are held to 'require' professional assistance. Of specific interest is the relatively recent trend towards graphic depictions of 'sufferers' and their 'conditions' in both reader-solicited and in-house-generated discussions of 'life's problems'.

In chapter seven, and continuing with the graphic-visual theme of chapter six, we look at how the next generation of commercial-psychological practitioners are trained via textbooks which increasingly draw upon popular culture in order to buttress their knowledge claims. Images of a dishevelled and hatchet-wielding Jack Nicholson from *The Shining* feature in pedagogic material on 'schizophrenia'. Pictures of a slightly less dishevelled Jack Nicholson dodging cracks in the pavement from *As Good As It Gets* illustrate 'obsessive com-

pulsive disorder'. And stills of an extraordinarily dishevelled Jack Nicholson (post-ECT) in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* appear in instructions for the management of depression. This chapter examines both the increasing use of popular cultural forms such as cinema, and also the appropriation of historical images, in the naturalisation of contemporary psychological stories about misery and madness in these texts.

In our final and concluding chapter, we look at some of the underlying reasons for the popular appeal of mass-mediated psychological help. We suggest that what such consumption goods do is to tap into and repeat a deep-seated, almost commonsensical, view of the 'modern subject', of what it is to be (any sort of) person today. This self is always divided, right from the start, into its sensuous (bodily) and thinking (mental) components, and it is continually urged, via a predominant 'politics of life itself' (Rose, 2001), to seek a resolution of its two 'sides'. Popular psychology embraces this 'model of man' and exploits it for explicitly commercial ends. Effectively it trades in a spurious ideal of human perfection and wholeness. Finally, then, we look at the history of how this peculiar idea of 'being human' came about; how such a limited and limiting story about ourselves became unproblematic and natural. And we beg to suggest possibilities for an alternative ethics and politics of the self that presages the demise of psychologised 'man'.

Our overall aim is, therefore, explicitly political. This is not a balanced book. Rather it is a balancing book, unearthing and also running counter to the massive dissemination and intrusion of psychological techniques into (indeed, *as*) the life of the consuming subject of late modernity. Everywhere today, the consumer-citizen of the global market-state is required to be inspected and to inspect themselves for si(g)n(s) of imbalance. They are increasingly policed and self-policed in terms of their status (or, more often, lack of it) as 'well-tempered' selves (Miller, 1993) or 'reasonable souls' (Foucault, 1990). This is a fundamental ensemble of techniques that support and bolster what has been called the 'risk society' (Beck, 2000). As Giddens reminds us, the phenomena of risk 'have entered deeply into our everyday lives' (Giddens, 1999: 52). And central to this thematics is the risk of therapy, including the risk of *avoiding* therapy. As Rose says of the late-modern self, it must:

style its life through acts of choice and, when it cannot conduct its life according to this norm of choice, it is to seek expert assistance. On the territory of the therapeutic, the conduct of everyday existence is recast as a series of manageable problems to be understood and resolved by technical adjustment in relation to the norm of the autonomous self aspiring to self-possession and happiness. (Rose, 1992: 151)

The omnipresent possibility of risk carries the continual possibility of the failure of the self — and very little chance of its harmonic resolution. Anxiety, then, is not merely a default option (something that happens when failure actually raises its ugly head); nor is it merely a surface symptom, condition or ‘syndrome’. Policing risk means that anxiety becomes the normal, routine, quotidian backdrop against which every ordinary everyday event is staged. How we drive in traffic, how we shop, which substances we ingest, how and with whom we have sex, which books we read, what clothes we wear ... and the rest of everyday decision-making: all of these are now subject to the calculations of the new psycho-scientific management. Driving, shopping, eating, fucking, reading, dressing: all such consumer activities are now open to diagnosis and therapy by the meta-commodity par excellence: capital-T Therapy. Conditions and syndromes are constantly being specified and respecified to apparently manage such otherwise uneventful events: road rage, co-dependency, shopaholism, sex-addiction, bibliophobia, fashion-victimhood.

In the brave new world of psychological types, no stone is unturned, and no turn is unstoned. You, the reader, cannot not be a consumer. And, insofar as you are a consumer, you are, by definition, an analysable entity. This book begins to scratch at the surface of that deep condition of late-modern being. It is, as the title says, a consumers’ guide. But it is also a guide to the at-once simple and complex fact of *being* a consumer as such and (*as such*) being the willing or unwilling subject of the new psycho-scientific management.

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