Psychology as Apparatus

An Interview with Sam Binkley

Interviewed by Derek Hook
Derek Hook and Sam Binkley

Introduction by Derek Hook

In order to introduce Sam Binkley and his work, I thought I would just offer a couple of points, just so that we've got a thematic sense of where we'll go, and then I'll ask some more specific questions. First, though, congratulations are in order. Sam is a full professor. He went up for professor maybe a year ago, and part of his dossier included four articles, which took him to the "top of his game," as such. One of them was the paper "Anti-Racism beyond Empathy," published in the journal *Subjectivity*, with the subtitle "Transformations in the Knowing and the Governing of Racial Difference" (Binkley, 2016). As it turns out, in around 2014, I had acted as a reviewer of that paper. It was a fantastic piece of work, which developed the Foucauldian notion of the *dispositif* and made the argument that empathy had become a dominant trope and a model for bypassing or avoiding racism. I was tremendously excited about it, and only subsequently did I realize that it was Sam's paper, and it was nice to have had access to it at that point because it was certainly something that I recommended to my students. I'm sure we'll come back to it. A second of Sam's papers included in his dossier when he went up for promotion was "The Government of Intimacy: Satiation, Intensification, and the Space of Emotional Reciprocity" published in *Rethinking Marxism* in 2011 (Binkley, 2011a). A third, which I heard him deliver in a talk at Birkbeck, University of London, was "Happiness in the Program of Neoliberal Governmentality." The fourth paper that he included in that dossier was "Psychological Life as Enterprise: Social Practice and the Government of Neo-Liberal Interiority" (Binkley, 2011b). So, with that as a bit of a background let's begin.

Derek Hook (DH): I suppose the first question is: how has the field of psychology responded to your work?

Sam Binkley (SB): Thank you, Derek, for this flattering introduction! With regard to your question, I never set out to engage the field of psychology precisely on its own terms. Frankly, it never occurred to me that such a dialogue would develop. I consider my interest to be in how subjectivity gets produced in the contemporary context with a particular emphasis on the discursive effects. So, I have always considered ways of writing and talking about the problem of subjectivity or the problem of one's own life and how those conversations translate into actually lived forms of subjective experience. I wrote a book titled *Getting Loose* which considered the countercultural lifestyle discourse of the 1970s – basically, hippies saying, "Let us live differently. Let us interrogate ourselves for the undue self-constraint we inherit from society, for our uptightness, and let's live looser. Let's open ourselves up to the impulsive flow of experience" (Binkley, 2008). I was interested in how the project they envisioned at that time, how this program of "getting loose," in their thinking, shaped new ways of living one's humanity. To understand this, I examined a lifestyle discourse that was articulated in a genre of countercultural publications with names like *The Whole Earth Catalog*, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, *Rainbook*, *Getting Clear*, and many others for the way they envisioned a sort of planned reduction of self-constraint through mundane daily activities like cooking or home construction. I hoped at the time that this book would add the important notion of a cultural vanguard to our understanding of the shifting ways in which new problematizations of the self develop and disseminate.

After that book, I wrote *Happiness as Enterprise*, which turned to more contemporary forms of self-help literature to understand how people set about related projects of self-government under different social and historical conditions, this time to transform

themselves into happier subjects (Binkley, 2015). What did this work of being happy entail, I wondered, what was its objective? How was that objective plotted or coded within what I considered to be a form of lifestyle literature, one that took the form of a self-help discourse in which popular psychology was an important source? The psychology in question was, of course, positive psychology, the psychology associated with Martin Seligman and others, which is a psychology of the happy life translated here into a popular self-help genre. So, in a sense both of these investigations were conducted as cultural studies, or as examinations of popular cultural conversations.

In the case of the happiness book, it hadn't occurred to me that what I was dealing with was a uniquely psychological discourse. But, actually, positive psychology is an academic research field. It's not just a self-help genre, though it dovetails well with self-help. It's a rigorously studied and very well-funded academic field. So, I was very surprised when I was contacted by David M. Goodman and Lynn Layton, who said, "This is fascinating work in the field of critical psychology. You should come meet with us, because we're all psychoanalysts and psychologists and we're doing just what you're doing." I had to Google critical psychology to find out what it was, though, Derek, I knew your work. I think I had read maybe your first book, *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power* (2007). In this book you use this phrase "critical psychology," and though I didn't know at the time what it meant, I was very interested to read your use of Foucault in the analysis of the psychological profession in South Africa. Critical psychology embodies, I came to learn, this kind of reflexive critique that fits well with my interest in lifestyle discourse as a cultural phenomenon.

A Critique of Anti-Racism

DH: My response to your work has always been an intuitive affinity precisely because, whether you call it critical psychology or not, so many of those themes that you engage are actually of crucial importance to psychology, even if you're engaging them from a Foucauldian and thus more critical vantage point. So, a couple of the terms you were using right now, I mean the whole self-help discourse, lifestyle discourse, subjectivity, happiness, these are the terms that populate

psychology. So, I suppose what I'm saying is, on the one hand it may sound odd to say how has psychology responded to your work, given that you're positioned in some respects outside of psychology, but in another way to me it seems that you do tackle fairly central topics within the broader discourse of psychology. One way of giving a different articulation to that question is this. We spoke briefly just before we started about the "Beyond Empathy" paper. You did a few presentations on the paper, and you mentioned that you got an unfavorable response from some colleagues. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

SB: Like many interdisciplinary scholars, I've never had a clear answer to the question "What do you do?" since this question really means: "What are you?" – it's an existential question that I have never been able to answer. But the answer to this question that I managed to muster was that I study those discourses and the broader apparatus, apparati in the plural, by which I am governed. In "The Government of Intimacy" I wrote about the history of relationships, marriage, and the conjugal bond, from the standpoint of its government by external authorities. I became very interested in the literature on neoliberalism and neoliberal modes of governmentality as described in the works of Nikolas Rose and Mitchell Dean. From this standpoint, it was possible to speak of a certain neoliberal technology of relationships and intimate life mediated by marriage and relationship counselors, advice columns, marriage blogs, and so on. This discourse has, it seemed to me, over the course of several decades, gradually tipped in favor of a certain individualistic imperative; where once marriage was defined by a set of obligatory relations, of dependency and reciprocities premised on mutuality and sacrifice, the conjugal bond has been increasingly redefined as a kind of opportunistic field, a market, if you will, which has to be governed as a field of enterprise. It was in this way that I took up the question of happiness as a similar field of governmental intervention, which was really the point of *Happiness as Enterprise* – that emotional life could be governed neoliberally, that emotional subjects are increasingly talked about as market actors, as people seeking opportunities to maximize their emotional returns on investment. In all of these conversations, the discourse in question was actually an apparatus, in the Foucauldian sense. It was a complex set of arrangements by

which people were ruled or induced to adopt a certain relation to themselves or to produce themselves in a certain way.

But the happiness book was already five years ago, and now I've struck out on a new project, turning to the question of race and racism, not as real entities but as the objects of an apparatus, as an aspect of life that gets governed through the ways it is talked about. Anti-racism, as I understand it, can be considered as an apparatus that induces people – principally but not exclusively White people – to go to work on themselves, to uncover the hidden truths of their own racism and to produce themselves as less racist people. This was the approach I took in an article titled "Anti-Racism beyond Empathy," which was published in the journal *Subjectivity* in 2016, and it seemed to make a lot of sense to me as this is an apparatus that really saturates my life (Binkley, 2016). I am frequently exhorted to mediate my racism, to come to terms with it, to confront it, to speak about it, to understand it, and to explore its movement – all toward the end of resolving and eliminating it. So I thought, I want to look at this. I want to see how the discourse of anti-racism works, and I want to see what its connections are with other formations of power. How is our current discourse on anti-racism inflected by certain neoliberal rationalities and logics?

That's a hard thing to do because most of my investigations have targeted discourses that I didn't feel any particular political affiliation with, although I have always felt tremendous empathy for my topics as a researcher. In other words, in other projects I was able to approach my subject matter and my informants with a Weberian sense of value neutrality or moral detachment, that is, a kind of non-judgmental appreciation. For example, it wasn't difficult to study the workings of positive psychology because I don't feel any particular kinship with positive psychologists. That's not completely true; in my heart, I think positive psychology is deeply flawed in its approach, but that wasn't my concern. I never set out to debunk positive psychology, only to reconstruct its thinking and to show how its operation aligned with other structural arrangements, such as that of neoliberal capitalism. At some moments, my skepticism made it necessary for me to stop interviews with positive psychology self-help coaches because of this hidden ambivalence. My deep doubts about what they were doing made it impossible for me to

interview them with sincerity, and they were such wonderful people and were so very nice to me that I couldn't handle the fact that in the back of my mind I was thinking something else. So, I had to stop interviewing.

Now, when you talk about anti-racism, well, anti-racism is something that I believe in, something that I've had a political commitment to my whole life, though I have never made anti-racism the center of my scholarly work. But as my project unfolded, I discovered that I was critically examining people with whom I felt deep political kinship. I wasn't necessarily criticizing, but I was examining and looking at certain linkages that develop between a political discourse that I'm supportive of and other neoliberal logics of government. From this effort came the article on empathy and anti-racism. It considered the notion of empathy as the driver of a certain logic of anti-racism. The article responded to a lot of the campus activism that had been going on in the United States and that was happening in my own institution. It extended an interest I've held for a long time in the ways in which economic logics reshape other cultural or interpersonal processes. In this way, I felt a very strong desire to move past what I considered to be the solution of empathy as it operated within this discourse of anti-racism, where it was prescribed that one had to feel the feelings of the other in order to transform oneself. And to me, this was part of the apparatus that I wanted to examine.

It seemed to me that there was a powerful tendency among a predominantly White cohort of specialists, principally with backgrounds in psychology but also education and management, who undertook the program of cultivating empathy in other people and in themselves. You had to feel what the other was feeling in order to transform yourself. I looked at that and I considered how it worked, and it seemed to me that it implied an effort to isolate, to magnify, and to invest in the emotional state of the other in order to produce an appropriate object for which one could experience empathy. In other words, efforts to feel what the other was feeling actually turned into efforts to produce the other. You could call this a sort of empathic othering, or even a fetishization. So, the imperative to feel the other's feelings, to feel the experiences of people of color and to produce oneself as a subject capable of understanding how people of

color were experiencing life in a racist society, was an operation that had a certain logic to it.

To dig a little deeper: I wanted to understand precisely how this logic operated. I hypothesized that it was something of an economic logic. The project of producing the other through empathy was fashioned on a certain logic of recompense, of payment, of remuneration. What the empathic subject owes the other is precisely empathy, and that empathy is made, like a payment, in roughly equal proportion to the amount of harm that the other has undergone. Like the discourse on happiness, this logic is implicitly neoliberal, but in a different way. In place of the neoliberal sense of enterprise, the logic of empathy inscribes an equally neoliberal sense of debt. It wants to inscribe a market relation across what might otherwise have been, for another generation and in another time, a moral or a social problem. The discourse of anti-racism extends this marketization of social morality by producing the other not as a subject to whom we are morally responsible, but as a sort of great creditor, as an object to whom payments can and must be made. And that debt is paid with empathy.

Much anti-racist discourse today, the kind we find in large organizations or practiced by professionals in human resources departments and in corporate diversity training programs, presumes that empathy is not fun. It's something that can only come as the result of a concerted effort, through "difficult conversations" and under considerable expert supervision. But it is work we are obliged to do. *Empathy must be paid, like a debt.* This to me is a very limiting way of conceiving the project of anti-racism. Moreover, there is a sense that this logic, while it is no doubt valuable and productive in many situations, also has the implied effect of reproducing precisely the kind of racism it purports to criticize. The other of the empathic project, after all, remains an object – a "thing" whose feelings must be felt. This apparatus doesn't want to resolve racism any more than psychiatry wants to eliminate madness or prisons want to prevent criminality. The apparatus always reproduces the object over which it exercises its jurisdiction as part of the process of reproducing its own legitimacy. One's racism, if by racism we mean the reduction of the other to an object, has to be sustained and cultivated as an always incomplete project of remaking.

I traced this rationality back to what I consider to be a simple inversion of the basic terms of racism itself. The basic terms of racism hold that you, the raced other, are incompatible with the basic social contract; as Charles Mills (1997) says, you can't be a citizen because you don't meet the terms of the social contract. You have a biological, hereditary attribute which prevents you from being a real citizen, and for this you are in debt. The social contract requires you to raise your kids properly, to maintain a job and to keep up your house. Through a racist lens, people of color don't do these things, and are therefore in debt. Collection on this debt can be made by those (White) signatories to the social contract (which is, in fact, a racial contract, as Mills argues) through extralegal means (such as the denial of housing, credit, education and so on, or even through more direct acts of violence). This is the classically racist view in which people of color are illicit beneficiaries of the terms of a contract to which they are unable to fully comply. Anti-racism, on the other hand, seems to accept the fundamental logic of that exclusion and of that debt, only it reverses the positions. Under racism, the raced other owes you for the civility he can't pay to you owing to his animal, less-than-human nature, and this failure to pay exposes him to forms of violence that can be legitimately committed. Under a racialized logic, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and George Floyd all "owed" their lives to the police, in a sense, because they were endemically incapable of meeting the contractual terms of law-abiding citizenship. So anti-Black violence is just collection on that debt. Under anti-racism, the other remains excluded, but this time it's you who's in debt and the other who is elevated to the function of the creditor. The payment you make is not racialized violence or the "social death" that Orlando Patterson (1982) talks about, but empathy. You must pay the other surpluses of empathic responsiveness in a way that confirms the other's exclusion. The attribute that marks the other is no longer biological. It's now emotional, and that attribute is not something that is going to marginalize you; it's something that makes a claim to your own affective production. I owe you feeling, or co-feeling. I owe you the activity of co-feeling your emotions.

Now, just to be clear, it's not that I specifically object to this arrangement politically, but it seemed to me that a better, or at least a different, politics of anti-racism might result from a certain hedonistic disposition that stands outside the economic logic of this empathic

debtor relation. I argued that it couldn't all be about paying debts but that there had to be a pleasure in White anti-racism, a productive and transformative pleasure, that there had to be a moment of pleasure for Whiteness in becoming anti-racist. I summoned this very Foucauldian notion of the aesthetics of the self to describe the pleasures of White anti-racism. In place of the debt relation, one had to shape oneself, one's White self, into something beautiful, into something capable of bringing new pleasures, both to oneself and to others. But it's very difficult to predict how people will read your work. After the article came out, people read this as if I were presenting a new platform for anti-racism centered exclusively on the pleasures of Whiteness, one that absolved Whites from their responsibility to empathize. I was criticized for being a bad ally, for slipping into this mode of White introspection, White fragility, et cetera, for reinscribing the centrality of the White subject at the center of a politics of race, and so on.

DH: So, you touched a nerve with colleagues.

SB: Yes, I did.

DH: I suppose in a vein of Foucauldian scholarship that is somehow inevitable, although this sounds like it's a particularly tense example of that. You could almost say the procedural methodological move in doing a Foucauldian-inspired piece of work like that is to be able to interrogate what is a common norm or a common discourse or a form of common sense. That is also a theme, I think, that seems to run through your work. Would you agree with that characterization, with the idea that part of critical labor is being able to re-inflect a norm or a popular cultural notion such as the importance of empathy?

SB: Yes. "Anti-Racism beyond Empathy" is probably the closest that I've been to something that is contemporary and that urgently matters to people. I don't think anybody was offended by my challenges either to positive psychology or to *The Whole Earth Catalog*. No one thought that there was a high stake in that. To me, there was a high stake because I was getting at other things through those engagements. But the conversation changes when you're conducting a kind of genealogy of these political forms that people are urgently committed to. Foucault himself always struggled in his relationship with the Left, with feminism and with what was then the gay movement. He was

always subject to the charge that he was insufficiently supportive of the theoretical constructions that these movements depended on. To Marxists, he said, "Look, I'm going to show that capitalism is actually not based on factories but on prisons." And, of course, to psychoanalysts he said, "Listen, the thing you call Oedipus, I'll tell you it's actually part of the same disciplinary apparatus that supports capitalism." But I think that what Foucault meant to do was not necessarily to disqualify the theoretical assumptions of movement politics but to point out the ways in which these assumptions, while great for movements, don't necessarily serve so well for other projects, such as an aesthetics of the self, for the work on the self one might undertake to make oneself beautiful, to find a pleasure in such forms of self work. Not everyone is receptive to this subtlety. There are those authors who write in that classically Marxian mode, even if they're not Marxists, who insist on a clear link between theory and practice. Intellectual work is only valid to the extent that it provides political ammunition for a struggle. I've never been one of those authors, and I would specifically discourage people from reading my work if I thought it would sidetrack them from their activism or undermine their political commitments. I accept that sometimes thinking too much can actually distract you from the task at hand. In some cases, if you're that kind of person, it might be more productive to simply accept as natural and a priori all the categories upon which anti-racist work is undertaken and not bother with the kinds of questions I am asking. My work would be more likely to relativize a more pragmatically conceived project of anti-racism, and for that reason I would not necessarily recommend it for all readers.

Neoliberalism

DH: Okay. So, you've mentioned the neoliberal order a couple of times, and I've got a few things to ask about that. It's another theme that runs through much of your work. Are we still in neoliberal times in the era of Trump?

SB: Oh, gosh, sure. I take my understanding of neoliberalism from Foucault's lectures and from the governmentality literature that grew up around his very discursively oriented, constructivist view of neoliberalism (Foucault, 2008; Dean, 1999). I mean, neoliberalism is not

a thing. I think it's important not to project a certain ontology onto neoliberalism or onto any other political or historical formation. Neoliberalism is not a thing; it is a way of colonizing things, of infiltrating existing formations, technologies, and institutions and redirecting, infusing them with a different kind of a logic, a different way of carrying out their operation. When a factory or a school is privatized, it is not destroyed and replaced with another. It might remain completely intact, but its mode of operation shifts in profound ways. It adopts a different relationship with its environment and with its future. It becomes enterprising, and it does this by recognizing, dignifying, and governing the enterprising dispositions of its constituents even as this recognition advances through a certain inscription. Psychology was neoliberalized when a technology of neoliberalism infused its mode of operation and made it work in a certain way. The way that neoliberalism made psychology work was by making the subjects of psychology entrepreneurs of their own emotional lives and by encouraging them to see themselves as autonomous, as not dependent on those old psychological authorities that once provided guidance for them. The therapist under neoliberalism is reduced in stature to a coach, to an equal, but is also a resource for the subject's exploitation. In the course of this, the subject him- or herself is radically truncated, condensed to a bare set of cognitive operations. Nobody is interested in depth anymore, and that's one of the ways that psychology is neoliberalized. This is something that Jeff Sugarman writes about very well (Sugarman, 2015).

So, it's not that neoliberalism displaced psychology; it's that neoliberalism infused psychology with a new way through which subjects might understand their own agency. I'm going to take charge of my emotional life, and I'm going to run it according to certain optimizing imperatives, like a business. I'm going to make it better. I'm going to maximize its potential. Through this process, the temporality of the psychological enterprise changes. It becomes less about going back in time to repressed or forgotten experiences, stored in the depths of a great interiority, less about repressed memory and the need to recover forgotten traumas. It becomes more about projecting one's thoughts into the future, anticipating and hoping for things you are going to do: about those states of happiness one anticipates experiencing.

Trumpism and the Wandering Imperative

DH: Another question I wanted to ask . . . you mentioned nationalism, populism that is happening at the moment. I know that some of the talks that you're planning on doing in the future on your coming trip to Europe will focus a little bit on Trump. Can you give us a bit of a taste of what this is about?

SB: Sure. Trump's election, together with the Brexit vote in the UK and similar events elsewhere, shocked a lot of people and drew us into a new perspective on a lot of things. It took the conversation on race that I had already responded to and put it on a new level, one that I interpreted through a perspective that I had never taken before, one that dealt more directly with the specific affective and emotional contents of people's actions and of a national and global mood and not just the discourses, the apparati through which those emotions were governed. In many ways this was a break with the discursive focus of my previous works and with the notion of governmentality as the effect of specifically situated rationalities. In light of these events, I became very interested in the affective field of the new populism and of the racial politics of this moment, and specifically in shame, and right now I'm just completing a book on shame and its relationship to Whiteness and to race.

But to get at this, let me back up a little bit. I've been very interested in Foucault for a long time. I'm very interested in the notion that these discourses are produced, they circulate, and they colonize us in such a way that we take these discourses and we use them to produce our own selves, our own subjectivities in certain ways. So, I'm a Foucauldian, I think you might say. I buy the argument. But I'm a difficult Foucauldian in that there is a lot about the way that Foucault described things and the way Foucault gets taken up in the surrounding literature which I don't like (Foucault, 1986). This led me to my more general critique of that branch of Foucault's work that is taken up in the field that sometimes is called governmentality studies. Nikolas Rose is someone that is strongly identified with this field and is still very influential in the conversation between Foucault and psychology (Rose, 1999). I admire his work tremendously – though, as in the case with the best engagements, I have my critique. There is a tendency in Foucault and in the kind of Roseian version

of Foucault to which I object. This is the tendency to posit a discursive formation in very abstract terms, to describe a range of experts and institutions that disseminate this discourse, and to consider the ways in which these experts and their institutions describe a subject in terms of a certain imperative. One *should* make oneself more efficient, more productive, more healthy, more civil, and so on. One *should* govern oneself in thus and such a way. Within this mode of analysis it is assumed that the subject herself will ultimately invest in this imperative, re-inscribe its urgency within her own habits of thought by inhabiting the discourse, by speaking the language of that particular discourse to herself.

If you read the analysis of these discourses closely, in the work of Rose but also in the work of Foucault himself, there is a stylistic quality that one comes to identify with very quickly. First, a discursive field is described and, in a sense, mimicked by the author. Foucault's famous ventriloquism implies a mode of critique which in a subtle way starts to speak in the voice of the discourse he is studying. This is how he begins *History of Sexuality Volume I*, with words to the effect of "For a long time, it has been said," and then he disappears into the discourse on repression (Foucault, 1984, 1986). Then, in a subtle way, there is a shift in the position of the speaker of this discourse, from the one who *must* do certain things to the one who feels the urgency of this imperative to do certain things, or from a "one must" to an "I must." There is an implied assumption that somehow these imperatives migrate from the level of institutions and expert conversations to the level of actual people and their private intrapsychic conversations and into the fabric of their personal lives. I call this the problem of the wandering imperative. Take, for example, the imperative "Society must be defended." Who feels this urgency? Presumably, two groups of people: experts participating in a conversation on population and security, officials, police, magistrates who describe a range of deviant infiltrators, abnormals of different stripes against whom society must be defended, but also individual members of those populations and deviants themselves, who experience a sense of urgency around, for example, the presence of racial others who pose a threat to the security of the population. It is the difference between experts and the laity. But were these two groups of people really thinking with the same mind? How did

they communicate, and what sort of contact did they have with each other?

I'm very much interested in interrogating the assumed relationship that develops between institutional discourses and private personal life, everyday life. That has really been the focus for a long time. *Happiness as Enterprise* was really about temporality, and it was really about trying to understand how we apply governmental imperatives to ourselves within the fabric of everyday temporality, within the time of our everyday conducts. Temporality was the way that I got around this kind of Roseian-Foucauldian *Voila!*, this presupposition that since it gets talked about on an institutional level, therefore it happens on the personal level. I took on this problem in another article that came out in between my interests in neoliberal psychology and the role that shame plays in race, and this had to do with biopower and how it is expressed through metaphor. In an article called "Biopolitical Metaphor: Habitualized Embodiment between Discourse and Affect," this problem of translation from expert to nonexpert realms is taken up through a consideration of the everyday use of metaphor (Binkley, 2018).

So, in other words, I'm still very interested in rethinking this basic Foucauldian assumption by bringing it around to the level of the everyday, but with my new interest in race and shame it's not through temporality or metaphor but though affect. Trumpism is not a rationality or not just a rationality. It's a new way of feeling, an emotion, and it's about shame. It is very difficult to capture Trumpism through the discursively oriented tools of governmentality theory or through the analysis of an implicit rationality. Trump is pure gut. Hitler had his intellectuals and in many ways was an intellectual. He wrote a book, although a very bad one. I'm not sure you could do the kind of intellectual study of Trumpism that people have done with Nazism. It lacks an intellectual foundation, or at least a robust one such as that possessed by Nazism. Trump's impulsiveness is so deeply anti-intellectual that it's difficult to trace to a doctrinal source. So, more recently, in an effort to say something about contemporary forms of racism, I have turned to emotion, and specifically to shame. Shame not only fits with our contemporary time, it gives an affective coloring to many of the effects of power and subjection that Foucault described. Shame presents a kind of self-encounter that helps us to

resolve the question of the link between private life and public discourse or between experts and lay people. Shame helps to ground the wandering imperative in actual relations and real moments. The prisoner under the panoptic tower, the patient in the clinic, the sinner in the confessional all seem to be experiencing some kind of shame, although Foucault, who had as little interest in emotions as he had in everyday practice, would never have used that word.

Race and Shame

DH: I am fascinated by how you utilize the concept of shame. In clinical work, and indeed in the psychoanalytic clinic, shame is often foregrounded as pointing to something very crucial about the subject, such as their fantasies, their sexuality, their particular modes of pre-libidinal enjoyment. Could you tell us a little more about how you utilize this concept theoretically, critically, politically, in your work?

SB: I've spent the last year or so working on something, tentatively titled *Strange Whiteness*, which might become a somewhat Foucauldian book on race. It reads race in terms of shame. Race, it seems to me, is all about shame, and it is through shame that we can understand the subjectifying effects of race. Race is thoroughly saturated with feelings of shame, but it's not the kind of shame that we typically discuss in conversations about race. I am not referring to the shame of racial positions – Whiteness, Blackness, and so on. It's not the shame of violence or racial privilege, or the shame of racial subordination, although those experiences also have their own shames that are important to understand. I'm interested in how race invokes shame on an ontological level. What more shameful thing could there be than to encounter one's manifest self, the self that possesses freedom and that makes moral choices, in terms of this kind of shadow self, this other biological self which is composed of a hereditary genetic attribute? This is the shame that belongs to the very idea of race itself, not just the things that are done in the name of race. It's because of this more ontological shame that we hate talking about race, that we avoid discussions of race even while we are enticed to talk about it. This is because race brings feelings of shame to anyone who is raced, which is now everyone, not just people of color but white people as well. Race makes us feel dirty, ashamed. So, race, shame,

and subjection are deeply and profoundly linked, I think. The history of this shame goes back a long way to the times when only some people were raced. Traditionally, the people who were shamed were the ones who were made the object of a shaming racialized gaze, typically people of color, who were inscribed with a sort of shame through the effects of colonial subjection. This is a point made very well by Frantz Fanon, that racism induces feelings of shame in those against whom it is brought to bear (Fanon, 1967). For this reason, it became imperative to counteract that shame through the intentional production of a compensatory pride, an affirmation of racial beauty whose effect it was to reverse the racist shaming of Black people by creating this kind of counter-affect, a defiant dignity.

But other things happen later on. Not only is race shameful, but it is bound up with the shame of exposure. It's not being able to prevent others from gazing upon your race, for seeing you as raced. The literature on shame gives a very prominent role to this function of exposure before others, not necessarily for possessing a negative attribute but simply for not having the wherewithal to conceal oneself. I recently rearranged some things in my home here in Boston, and I moved a plant that sat in front of a window, exposing the inside of my home to the gaze of people walking by on the sidewalk. I felt such shame! That I could allow people to look into my living room was such a shameful thing! In other words, it's not necessarily that you are exposed for *being* this thing or that thing, it's that you're exposed at all, that you can't control, or don't care to control, the access strangers have to your intimate life. Levinas talks about the shame of poverty as tied with the shame of not being able to conceal one's own body behind ragged clothing that allows strangers to look through (Levinas, 2003). Race is kind of like that. It's an exposure, though traditionally it has been one that White people have been able to avoid. As a White person, and particularly as a White male, I can interact with anyone and, in most situations, I am allowed to imagine that they are not thinking about my race, and am thereby allowed to not think about it myself. My race functions as a universal, a nonrace, and I don't have to undergo feelings of exposure. I do not have to feel that I've given strangers access to anything particularly sensitive about myself. For a person of color, every interaction, or a great many interactions, involve the feeling of an exposure to which no direct

consent has been made. Within the frame of racism, the shame that accompanies race is a shame that says, "My God, any stranger can gaze upon my race, upon such a deep aspect of myself!" To be a raced subject, any kind of raced subject, is to suffer the shame not only of having bad things, to hide or of having done bad things, (though that is also a possibility), but of being unable to conceal from the gaze of the other a deep ontological attribute, a biography and a history, and a particular formation of racial flesh. So, there is a kernel of similarity between the racial experiences of White people and others, although this similarity is obviously quite limited – significant questions of scale and intensity distinguish the kinds of racial shame black and white people experience.

Now, in the years that Whiteness was invisible, during which it was simply the anonymous norm, White people were utter strangers to this shame. Of course, Whiteness has never been entirely invisible; people of color have always studied Whiteness and come to know its ways simply as a matter of survival. But during this time, Whiteness was at least invisible to itself, which meant that White people didn't have to confront that shame of exposure because Whiteness was presumed to be the norm. Today, things are very different. Today, White people and Whiteness itself as a racial condition has been made conspicuous not just to people of color but to other White people and to themselves as ‘raced subjects, as White subjects, and this new visibility, as a sense of exposure, has incurred new forms of racialized shame, White shame. These new White shames have led to a variety of convulsive responses, from Trumpian rage to a new politics of White introspection.

White Shame

DH: It sounds like you're moving toward a more reflexive dimension in how you think about shame in connection to Whiteness. I suppose that shame without some or other forms of reflection, or, as you put it, introspection, is not particularly useful?

SB: No, it is useful, and it's a good thing that there has developed such a robust and general conversation on Whiteness. Calls to interrogate Whiteness have opened up new conversations on race and all those small-scale conversational violences through which racism operates – microaggressions, although there is a lot about this term

that I think has to be rethought. But, like a lot of good things, it has a downside. Reflexivity pushes us to think, to make ourselves differently, but reflexivity also becomes coded and incorporated into institutional structures, and right now I see a process like this happening. One way to understand the two-sidedness of this process is to consider precisely what it is that White people experience as they discover themselves racially shamed for the first time. The answer I pose is that White people are ashamed of their own ocularity, the authority of their objectifying gaze, which is the gaze that shames others. White people have historically been the great shamers of others, and they have shamed through a way of looking, glancing at people, just as Fanon noted. White looks are shaming in so far as they make others feel their bodies, making conspicuous the very materiality of other's selves. White looks can be sham*ing* but they can also be shame*ful*, if these looks themselves are exposed. White looks pry into the private realms of others' lives. The White look is a stare, or a gawk: it is an absorbed looking that exposes Whites themselves as the servants of their own racism. And this White gawking is shameful, even when it is expressed in a looking-away. What a shameful thing to be such a shamer! The White gaze is an indecent, prying gaze, the great exposer of the races of others.

So, White shame today is the shame of shaming, or the shame of being exposed shaming, being caught shaming by being caught looking, gazing and gawking at the races of others. It is the shame of the illicit spectator who gazes salaciously and in a degraded fashion on the race of others. Shame, after all, is contagious. We are ashamed for those we shame. This makes sense when one considers that shaming has, in modern society, been so radically discredited. You're not allowed to shame people anymore, and you're certainly not allowed to stare at them for the simple pleasure of doing so. The figure of the sovereign for Foucault, the king – he could shame people. He could hang you up on a public scaffold and just torture you for his own pleasure and for the pleasure of anyone who cared to look, which is a deeply shaming experience. In fact, the theme of shame and the prohibition on shame hangs over *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979) The sovereign could inflict shame through his own gaze and take a specifically ocular pleasure in it. But that sovereign was long ago shamed, overturned and replaced by the biopolitical, which mandates that we must care for each other and

cultivate each other's lives (Wüschner, 2017), The shamer, therefore, is shamed as a throwback to some obsolete form of power, and the shaming gaze that is inscribed at the heart of Whiteness has itself become a shameful thing.

So, with White people's capacity to cast shame exposed, White people have become vulnerable to a new sort of shame, an experience many of them find strange and unbearable. The vulnerability of Whiteness to this shaming is evident everywhere; read the criticism of Whiteness all over the Internet and you'll notice a strong emphasis on the transparency and exposure of Whiteness to people of color. Black critics assert that they see into the White soul, that they know what Whites will do before they do it, that they know where White people come from, they know their biographies, their dreams, and their nightmares even better than White people know them themselves. There's a Netflix series, *Dear White People*, that savors the exposure of Whiteness, and it resonates through the works of people like Ta-Nehisi Coates. At the institution that I teach, I was recently invited by someone I have never met to enter into what she described as "heart-work" to deal with structural racism. I thought: My goodness! Does this person really see into my heart? Am I really so exposed? How did this person acquire such knowledge? So, I felt tremendous shame. We could read this as a sort of Hegelianism: this is the truth of the Lord that is possessed by the Bondsman, and that the Bondsman acquires through his domination. But in Hegel the Bondsman becomes smarter than the Lord, the same Lord that raised him up and held him in bondage. Servants and slaves have always known their masters better than masters knew themselves. But the new sense of white exposure is one that has acquired a certain sense of revenge. By claiming knowledge of your heart, I'm going to savor your exposure, to make you suffer the shame that I have suffered. To the extent that you have charged me with the administration of your flailing White heart, I'm going to make the exposure of your Whiteness an insufferable shame, as unbearable as the exposure of my Blackness has been for so long. That's not really dialectical in Hegel's sense. That's something closer to Nietzschean vengeance.

So, the question becomes, How does one respond to such unbearable shame? How might Whites survive this shaming? Even, how

might Whites make use of it politically, in a struggle against White supremacy? Trump voters answer that question in their own way: rage and violent retribution. Shame is met with guns and MAGA hats, or tiki torches and shields. We all know that story. But for others, for those identified with progressive White anti-racism or that social pattern we describe as "woke," the trauma of shame is countered differently. Woke embraces a sort of displacement and recuperation that comes with the nobility of shaming itself. In shame, the self is split between virtuous and reviled parts. While one half of ourselves is cast out and repudiated (the bad self about which one is ashamed), the other half, the half that condemns the bad half, is valorized and redeemed. We see among White people an effort to dignify shame, to become, in effect, technicians of their own shaming and entrepreneurs of a certain self-transparency, a shaming self-exposure, mediated, as they experience it, through their exposure before a subaltern other. An odd development occurs as this truth that the slave possesses is transformed into a kind of therapeutic authority, a subaltern expert before whom one bares one's soul. White people embrace the criticism of their Whiteness as if it were a kind of therapeutic truth, as a kind of secret of their deeper selves whose discovery brings a moment of catharsis, or awakening (Binkley, 2020). In other words, the therapeutics of White shame, like reactionary Whiteness, is all about the containment and neutralization of shame. The Lord, unable to overpower the Bondsman and the Bondsman's knowledge, gets on the couch and makes the Bondsman his therapist – an Other-presumed-to-know, as Lacan put it, though perhaps a rather cruel and vengeful one. But, in doing so, the Lord preserves his sovereignty.

Freedom, or the Ends of Resistance

DH: In a way, that is also a Foucauldian type of position, and it leads me to another question. What about psychology and the relationship to freedom? That may not be particularly easy to answer in the context of your work, but here is another way of thinking about it. It's interesting that you mentioned the shift that happens when you overlay Foucault and Rose, and I think it's particularly apparent when it comes to one question of freedom, actually, but particularly apparent

when we start to see how each of them deals with the notion of ethical practices of subjectivity or ethical practices of the self.

It's odd if one reads Rose in the light of Foucault's (1979) *Discipline and Punish*, where there seems almost to be a certain kind of fatalism. It seems very difficult to escape the downward and upward permeation of power into subjectivity, but of course there is a kind of optimism, slightly odd in some respects, this political optimism, that seems to come into the later Foucault (1988a, 1988b), the idea of ethical practices of subjectivity, ethical practices of freedom. What is your take on that? How would you think of freedom via Foucault in terms of your work? Because in a way I see what you're saying, because Foucault doesn't for the vast majority – certainly in the genealogical analysis he doesn't want to say this is an answer. He is doing kind of what you're saying: this is how it seems to work, but I'm not giving you any political prescriptions. There is a kind of Nietzschean quality there of a genealogy where one sees how the thing is produced, but one doesn't then become a moralist who takes on a very explicitly or overly political position – at least within the analysis being offered.

So, how would you engage with this notion of freedom, either via Foucault or just now today between us?

SB: Well, that's a question that a lot of people working in a Foucauldian tradition get asked: Where's the way out of power? And, of course, it's a question Foucault never wants to answer directly as he prefers to work negatively, dismantling an apparatus without providing any particular indication as to the way out. Methodologically, I like the notion of abandoning the reader. I'm going to lead you somewhere; I'm going to destroy a lot of things around you and then abandon you. In my imagination, this is as traumatic an experience for the reader as it is for the author, but it's a trauma that moves the reader to conceive of their own ways out. It forces the reader to become creative, to begin to imagine new alternatives to the old forms of power. Of course, this is a generous assessment of this effect on the reader, the effect of what Foucault called an "experience book." A less generous assessment would conclude that you've written a book that is simply positivistic and not really critical or that is descriptive without a critical engagement. These are debates that have surrounded *Discipline and Punish* for a very long time.

But I am drawn to the notion of abandoning the reader. I think the critical impact of a lot of analytic work gets diminished when there is a happy conclusion or a too clear invocation of some notion of freedom. On the question of race and the moment of freedom that might occur through a project of anti-racism, I think it's an important question to raise. Anti-racism as a psychological project is not explicitly political inasmuch as it doesn't directly aspire to diminish constraint and produce freedom. Psychology is a medical science, and as such its program is curative; it wants to restore people to a state of good health, and through this restored health it is assumed people will produce more democratic societies. The therapeutic telos is meant to restore health, not to secure freedom. I can accept that in some ways these amount to the same thing or that they can at least reinforce each other, but in my view they're different enough to warrant serious and separate consideration. A more radical project of White anti-racism would not be curative, in the medical sense of the term, but generative in the sense of enabling the production of a new kind of subject, of enabling a new way of enacting White subjectivity itself. I imagine an anti-racism that creates an open horizon, and in that sense there is some kinship with the kinds of aesthetics of the self that Foucault takes as the way out of the power relations he describes.

I think programmatic empathy and the therapeutics of White anti-racism offer good ways to make important structural changes and to ensure somewhat egalitarian institutions, but I don't think they're good at enacting entirely new modes of Whiteness, at unmaking and remaking racial subjectivities. These programs are necessary but not sufficient elements of a wider project on anti-racism. In addition to this, there has to be a generative moment. In fact, I would argue, White anti-racism has to operate on two levels, one defined by responsibility and the other by inventiveness. Guilt has a bad name in the conversation on race, but there are times when one should feel guilty, when one should say "I will give to you what I owe you." There are moments in which simply being a guilty White person is the only thing that you should do. But guilt by itself is not a generative relation. Guilt is a debt relation; it dictates that we remain the same in order that we might make certain remunerations. So, in addition to guilt what is required is an aesthetic element, an artistry,

a pleasure in making oneself differently, or what Foucault calls an askesis of the self.

This element, too, is regarded with skepticism in conversations around White anti-racism. To claim that one is enacting one's Whiteness differently is discredited as an effort to ignore the sedimentation of history and ultimately as another reassertion of White privilege itself. I can see that this is a valid charge, but you have to do something. It's true that every situation comes laden with history, but every situation also leaves open the possibility of interpreting that history differently. There is always an indeterminate moment within every situation, no matter how historically inscribed. This is something Marxists and Foucauldians can agree on: men make history under conditions inherited from the past, and where there is power there is resistance.

To describe Whiteness as anything other than a deep and profound responsibility, or a debt which has to be paid, is something that is radically out of step with the current conversation on Whiteness and White anti-racism, which is steeped in the therapeutic logic and in the debt relation that we touched on earlier. A political emphasis on the performativity of identity as an act of self-fashioning is something that sounds like it comes from another era – I'm thinking of the kinds of queer theories that were popular in the 1990s and the activism of ACT UP, which placed a very Butlerian emphasis on the fluidity of gender identities and so on. All of that seems quite remote at this point. If you remember the impact of post-structualist theory on social movements at that time, the objective was to counter austere-Marxisms and Feminisms with a new politics of pleasure. You had to interrogate essentialism, to make identities performative, or to acknowledge their intrinsic performativity. This would, it was believed, disarm the anxiety, the heteronormative panic and the gender essentialism that fueled so much violence. Essentialism would be replaced by a politics of hedonistic performativity. We're all basically drag queens anyway, so just acknowledge that and all these problems will go away. In that light, I wonder if it's possible to consider Whiteness through that lens as a performative enactment that might be performed differently, understanding that your Whiteness is not always a curse on the other, that actually there is a pleasure in the performance of Whiteness that can be shared, one that opens new spaces of sociability – that the other might actually take pleasure in a Whiteness you shape and that you share with them. The conversation now equates Whiteness with harm, ignorance, and arrogance, as if all White people have an inner Trump they are struggling to expunge like a petulant Christian. The project now is the delve into the concealed essence of one's Whiteness, though it is my sense that once an essence is sought after, it is inevitably produced and consolidated. A different idea is that there might be ways of shaping Whiteness as a gift, as a performance, that people of color might actually find pleasure in a Whiteness that you can perform for them and with them in ironic ways and in playful ways.

I think a good place to go with this is to Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin's interpretation of Rabelais is noted for its reading of medieval carnivals as a form of performative reverie in which uniquely traditional roles were overturned and new relations were enacted. (Bakhtin, 1965) These were dialogical enactments; there was no spectator, no audience, no performer, just an ongoing interactiveness around the debasement of everyone's traditional identities. Bakhtin focuses on the profane character in which this dialogic is enacted. Through costumes with exaggerated genitalia, enormous mouths and buttocks, these were identities meant to subvert the solemnity of the Catholic processions and Christian liturgical ceremonies such as Lent. In the carnivalesque, as I've mentioned in the broader context of race, we are all shamed, but we are also redeemed in our shame, a shame without spectators and without objects. There is no exposure in the carnival. Our shame becomes performative, a performative offering to the other, who is also a profane spectator and a participant. The conversation on race right now looks a lot more like Lent than it does like a medieval carnival. It's a place one goes to engage in virtuous self-flagellation, to seek the truth of one's racial self and exorcise one's flesh. White people today believe that their Whiteness is inevitably and only poison for themselves and for the other. They're as afraid of their Whiteness as medieval Christians were of their sexuality and hence as eager to confess, which is fine for those that enjoy that sort of thing, though as many people of color point out, listening to all that confession can get pretty tiresome. But I think it's important to keep open another possibility, that Whiteness can be the object of a profane pleasure, a

playfulness from which new pleasures are generated. So, in a sense I'm proposing the reimagining of the racial field as one of performativity and play. There has to be a moment where you can say, "Hey, I'm over here now. Oh, look at that. You didn't expect that. I'm going to throw the ball to you, and what are you going to do with it?" Of course, the equal playing field that play presumes does not exist, owing to structural reasons, and work on transforming those structures has to be done. But that doesn't mean we have to wait for those structures to be corrected before we begin to imagine what play might mean. I'm not sure if that meets the requirements for freedom as you intended the question, but I think it's a good start.

The Ambivalence of Psychologization

DH: It seems to me part of what is so vital about your work is that you could say, to risk a generalization, that much if not all of psychology is on the brink of psychological reductionism just by nature of what the discipline is, or, differently put, that it invariably risks depoliticization. And I think this is also why I feel a sense of kinship with your work – because so much of what you do in some way points to that. So, for example, if empathy becomes equated simply with antiracism, then we see a kind of psychological procedure which is adequate; apparently, it's now sufficient to be empathetic to be antiracist. It reminds me of arguments which say, "Why do you want to now think about the response to racism simply as more tolerance?" (Zizek, 2007). Again, you have a psychological theme which is now supposed to be adequate as a way of responding to the political. Meaningful structural change, which is to say effective political change at broader sociological and institutional levels, is thus sidelined in favor of a change at the level of psychological dispositions. Such a move, while not necessarily cynical or disingenuous – it can be genuinely meant – can impede structural change precisely because people start to feel that this is effectively the most important change that should be made. So, given that in psychology we so often see a depoliticizing move of the sort I've just suggested, it seems absolutely vital that we have that type of work – critical forms of psychology – that brings that political dimension back in again and again.

It seems to me that that is very much a part of what you do. I don't know if you had a comment on that, but another question I had was about one of the other projects that you have in mind, that you may have started by now, that links to some of the work you have already spoken about and deals with Black rage and White listening. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

SB: Thank you. I think that's a very interesting question as it goes to the heart of what we mean by a critique of the "psy apparatus." When does the psychologization of an event politicize it, and when does it depoliticize it? I've concentrated on the latter instance, on what you aptly term psychological determinism, or how a discourse of psychology suppresses the political character of something. But we've known since second-wave feminism that the personal is political, that it's politicization through therapeutic intervention that can produce powerful cultural effects. I think it's important to remember that psychologization is very ambivalent, that every instance of psychological reduction is accompanied by a simultaneous politicization, that new perspectives and new possibilities are always stirred when a problem gets psychologized.

Two years ago, I presented the first version of a paper called "Black Rage, White Listening," and it's evolved into a published piece that is included in one of the anthologies emerging from the Psychology and the Other conference series (Binkley, 2019). Against the backdrop of the broader critique of psychology for its depoliticizing effect, I wanted to flip the argument and consider how the emergence of a Black psychology in the 1960s could be read in two ways. It had the effect of crystalizing and channeling certain racial affects and giving them an intensity that aligned with the Black radicalism of the time. But it also had the effect, as the years went on, of reining in and capturing this intensity, of placing it within an institutional discourse in which the problems it posed could be applied only to certain purposes.

The book *Black Rage* by William Grier and Price Cobbs was an important book from that period (Cobbs & Grier, 1968). At a moment in which Black militants were mobilizing and the country felt very threatened by this new militancy, American society was trying to understand the source not just of Black despondency or Black

suffering but the psychic causes of Black militancy. Of course this militancy was very productive not only in shaping new sensibilities and racial subjectivities, but in affecting long lasting structural change. At the time, however, there was much speculation within the psychiatric community, much of it from Black psychologists and psychiatrists, that the militant response could be traced to a specific psychic formation, a fragmented psyche or an unresolved Oedipal relation. I looked at that discussion among Black psychologists, and I tried to understand how the projection of that Black psyche continues to operate in the discourse on race today. I mentioned earlier how the subjectivity of Blackness had to be invented as a subject capable of exercising credit, as a crediting subject to which payments could be made and around which the cultivation of empathy could be organized. I also mentioned how Blackness had to be invented as a kind of therapeutic authority, a subject bearing truths that could transform White shame into a project of self-discovery. All of these developments presumed the construction of Black suffering and Black anger in a specific way. And the psychology of Blackness from this time also served this function. I felt that this psychological subject had to be excavated, particularly as the figure of the angry Black entered into a kind of relationship with another psychologized figure, the listening White. To understand how these two figures operated and the kind of economy they established, one had to grasp their relation, the relation of Black rage and White listening.

DH: Can you tell us what White listening is? What is that?

SB: I was responding directly to things that were happening at the institution at which I teach. As a consequence of a student mobilization, the anger of a group of Black students, it seemed to me, was valorized, greeted with a kind of oracular reverence by a group of faculty who were intent on listening. I viewed that listening as an active process – the notion that White people are going to learn and listen and that it's very important to listen to these angry young voices because they know something that you need to know about yourself, that Black rage becomes this voice capable of shedding light on the authentic White subject, which White people don't yet understand but they have to learn to understand. This is kind of the way Foucault talked about madness as a voice that, through its exclusion from truth and reason, actually spoke the most profound truths. So, this

kind of oracular authority was projected onto Black rage. We have to listen to it because it's the truth of who we are. And of course, the students were only too willing to give the faculty the therapy session they were signing up for. This initiated a long series of events centered on calls for the self-interrogation of Whiteness amongst the faculty, and at one point I was required to undergo mandatory cultural competency training, though I decided to decline the invitation. Later, at a public discussion, I was charged with White fragility after making some critical remarks and was formally asked not to attend cultural competency training at all!

In other words, what I sensed was that the linking of these two activities, raging and listening, achieved a certain symbiosis, a managerial equilibrium within the neoliberal organization. I became interested in the history of listening and raging, on the link between the two and how this linkage is transposed from a therapeutic ethos to neoliberal managerial practices. It seemed that the apparent contention between anger and listening concealed a hidden pact, a concealed therapeutic agreement that each would benefit and neither would seriously challenge the other. Have you ever quarreled therapeutically? With the implicit understanding that the quarrel itself was a kind of exercise in the release of emotion that was never intended to upset the ecology of the relationship? That's how it felt.

DH: It's a powerful argument. A question, though. You make the case about the fetishization of Black rage within certain institutional contexts very articulately, although I am also wondering what room there is for something approaching Black rage in today's America. Presumably there is some space, limited space, maybe, in institutional settings where there is perhaps a degree of fetishization, but where else is that possible? I suppose I'm just thinking of all these NFL debates and kneeling – an act which to me doesn't seem necessarily provocative is read by Trump and associated conservatives as enormously problematic. This leads to a situation where it becomes difficult to express any opposition of that sort.

SB: So, what are the limits of my critique of the fetishization of Black rage? The Trumpian reaction to Colin Kaepernick may be fetishistic but in a very different sense. Trump looks for "enemies" to confront. His view is one of simple force against force. He owes Kaepernick nothing, and doesn't give a damn for his feelings. But Kaepernick's

kneeling is not an appeal to a liberal white listener. Kaepernick's gesture is a public symbol that brilliantly draws out the violence of his opponents. Trump's racism and the racism of the NFL are publicly exposed in their response. Similarly, Black Lives Matter are angry people. They're mad because cops kill a lot of Black people in the United States, and they are transported by rage. The events following the killing of George Floyd here in America but also globally suggest that not all Black rage comes wrapped in these psychologized discourses. Not all Black rage originates with the fetishism of White listening, though White listening is a mobile and flexible means of capturing the effects of Black rage.

The attack on the police station in Minneapolis or the looting of the Macy's in Manhattan were not acts of rage that presumed White listening. These were acts of rage that were willing to risk retaliatory White violence. Like those uprisings following the beating of Rodney King or the murder of Martin Luther King, these were acts of utter self-abandonment in the name of truth. So, what precisely is the relationship of these acts of rage to the psy apparatus? Let me answer this way. In one of his best-known interviews, Foucault sat down with a group of radical French Maoists sometime in the early 1970s (Foucault, 1980). They talked about the proposal that people's courts be used to judge the actions of the French police. People's courts operate autonomously and spontaneously, outside of any constitutional jurisdiction, to bring justice directly to the oppressor. Such courts had been used during the French revolution and in the Paris Commune and were a common instrument of the Maoist movements in China. While Foucault's interviewers supported their use, Foucault was critical, arguing that the introduction of any juridical process was only part of a wider absorption of the activity of direct, popular justice into an expanded state apparatus. Foucault wanted to keep direct justice, popular justice, which he considered to be a prejuridical act of revenge, separate from the juridical incorporation by any kind of court. Foucault had in mind an episode during the French Revolution recalled as the September executions in which a Paris mob attacked and murdered jailed members of the deposed ruling class – a mob act as a direct expression of revenge against an oppressor – although it was not long before a makeshift system of people's courts was established to rein in these violent responses. For Foucault, in a

sense, the people's courts were too Bourgeois! This was a reply the French Maoists were surprised by. While I'm not sure I would go as far as Foucault did on the question of popular justice, I would suggest that today the ways in which we psychologize racial protest, that we adopt a "listening" posture with regard to their underlying emotions and sentiments, stands in a similar position to that of a people's court; these acts of rage directed against police, statues, department stores, et cetera, represent a certain intensity, one which brings the possibility of a shock and of new kinds of subjectivity, new shames and new selves. But such intensities are absorbed into a new "listening," a psychologized managerialism as they are remade as problems of interiority, of biography and introspection, of the "real" feelings of the other and of coming to know one's Whiteness and coming to understand the anger of Black people. These all become discoverable truths mediated by a discourse of psychology.

DH: So much psychology seems to play the role of a radical depoliticization of political issues. This seems one way of thinking about the moment of capture that you speak about. There is also a certain mode of neoliberal subjectivity which is also active in depoliticizing politics. What I'm getting a sense of in speaking to you and thinking about your work is the sense that what you do is to trace the multiple trajectories of a type of depoliticization which affects psychology and which psychology in turn relays in response to certain problematics and understandings within society. And it seems that in some respects the space for politics of a certain sort is getting smaller and smaller via these two modes, these two interlinked modes of depoliticization. That's just a way of trying to think about some of the themes in your work.

SB: Yes. Deleuze and Guattari (1980) used the phrase "apparatus of capture" to describe the function of some set of arrangements to absorb and redirect otherwise subversive lines of flight, and the Foucauldian conversation on psychology tends to fall in line with this assessment. Psychology captures, but it also stirs. If you explode in anger at me for something and I respond, "Oh, Derek, I understand you're struggling with your memories of your childhood" and so on, I've captured your explosion and put it into categories. But at the same time, if I ask, "Derek, how are you feeling? You seem tense," this is an opening, an invocation that could only come about through the invocation of a psychological sensibility. So, it's never as simple

as that. Every capture is also an enactment, a mobilization of something, and vice versa. Those are the pieces that I have to work with, though I have to confess I haven't quite figured out how to put them all together yet!

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