II

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THERAPY CULTURE AND THE PRODUCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY IN NEOLIBERALISM[1]

ABSTRACT
This article explores the relationship between neoliberalism and the phenomena of "therapy culture". We define therapy culture as a consequence of the spread of ideas, discourses, and practices from psychology and psychotherapy into various realms of society. Previous studies, drawing from cultural sociology, Marxism, and governmentality theory, have failed to adequately address how therapy culture integrates subjectivity with the institutions of the neoliberal mode of regulation. We begin with a historical overview of therapy culture's evolution through the twentieth century and its role in neoliberal economic reforms. Our analysis then delves into conceptualizing the neoliberal mode of regulation, emphasizing the role it gives to subjectivity. Finally, we propose a theoretical framework integrating Foucault's "technologies of the self" and Lacan's concept of "fantasy" to conceptualize the relationship between neoliberalism and therapy culture. By relying on this framework, we will conclude that therapy culture serves as a governmental technology through which neoliberalism integrates subjectivity into the process of capital accumulation.

Introduction

Contemporary research and theoretical conceptualizations of neoliberalism often emphasize the significance subjectivity has in this mode of regulation. As Krce-Ivančić puts it: "...neoliberal subjects are neoliberalism, or, more precisely, neoliberalism is above all a form of subjectivity...What is essentially new in neoliberalism is the change in subjectivity" (Krce-Ivančić 2020: 208). Such emphasis on the importance of subjectivity in neoliberalism has spurred a large

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number of studies, mostly inspired by Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism as a governmental regime that seeks to regulate the actions of individuals through their dimension of subjectivity, that is, through the regulation of their relationship with themselves (Lemke 2001; McNay 2009; Read 2009; Dean 2010: 175–205; Cotoi 2011; Gane 2013). Hence, many authors exploring neoliberalism have drawn inspiration from Foucault's assertion that when studying governmentality, one should investigate the intersection of "technologies of domination" and "technologies of the self" (Foucault 2016: 25).

One field of research that has emerged in studying this intersection deals with the relationship between neoliberalism and the phenomenon known as "therapy culture". The investigation of this phenomenon has a substantial history in the social sciences and humanities. Indeed, since the 1950s, various authors have noted the growing importance of therapeutic and psychological knowledge in various social institutions and culture (Wootton 1959: 17; Berger 1965; Rieff 1966; Lasch 1991 [1979]). Thus, therapy culture is generally understood as the result of a gradual process of "psychologization", which denotes the diffusion of various discourses and techniques from disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy through state and economic institutions as well as through culture and the everyday lives of citizens[2] (Nehring and Kerrigan, 2022: 3). This process of knowledge dissemination from the so-called psy-sciences was observed almost three decades before the emergence of neoliberalism, but the research into therapy culture developed significantly only when it was noted that psychological knowledge gained great importance in the process of neoliberal restructuring of institutions and culture (Dineen 2001; Furedi 2004: 95).

The research dealing with the relationship between therapy culture and neoliberalism is infused with numerous theoretical perspectives[3]. Authors that subscribe to a Marxist perspective investigate how psychiatric institutions and therapy culture reproduce the ideology of the ruling class and contribute to the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and class domination. From a Marxist perspective, therapy culture in neoliberalism serves the role of individualizing socio-economic issues and reducing their causes to individual psyches (Parker 2014; Cohen 2016; Ferguson 2017). On the other hand, researchers such as Eva Illouz and Suvi Salmenniemi rely on cultural sociology. They view therapy culture as a cultural matrix that functions like a script guiding individuals in the process of forming subjectivity and social interactions in the fluid culture of late modernity[4] (Illouz 2007; Illouz 2008; Salmenniemi 2019; Salmenniemi

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2   Lionel Trilling claimed as early as 1955. that psychoanalysis has become the "slang of our culture" Trilling (1955: 12).

3   For a comprehensive exposition of the main currents in the research of therapy culture see Wright (2008).

4   Illouz and Salmenniemi can also be classified under a feminist theoretical perspective in the study of therapy culture. Authors that subscribe to this perspective often point out how therapy culture has influenced the breakdown of the private-public dichotomy by providing a discourse through which women could publicly speak about

et. al. 2020). Lastly, Foucauldian-inspired studies of therapy culture from the perspective of governmentality theory should be mentioned, with sociologists Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller being the most notable representatives. These authors conceptualize therapy culture as one aspect of neoliberal governmental technologies through which individual subjectivity is incorporated into the apparatus of neoliberalism (Rose 1999; Miller and Rose 2008).

Each of these approaches suffers from a conceptual deficiency that Mladen Dolar identifies in Althusser's understanding of ideology. In his article "Beyond Interpellation" Dolar criticizes Althusser, claiming that his theoretical framework fails to explain how ideology, embodied in practices governing various institutions, incorporates and regulates subjectivity (Dolar 1993). Similarly, the aforementioned approaches to researching the relationship between therapy culture and neoliberalism fail to adequately conceptualize the role therapy culture has in incorporating subjectivity into the neoliberal mode of regulation[5]. This article precisely aims to construct a theoretical framework that conceptualizes the role therapy culture has as a mediator between subjectivity and institutions regulated by neoliberal norms. Our framework will be based on a conceptual apparatus that combines ideas developed in Lacanian psychoanalysis, post-operaist social theory and governmentality theory inspired by the work of Michel Foucault.

From The Therapeutic Ethos to Therapy Culture: On the History of Psychologization in the Twentieth Century

This segment of the article will be dedicated to theoretical and historical reflections on the role of knowledge about the human psyche in Western societies during the twentieth century. By elaborating the process of the growing importance of this knowledge, which we have termed "psychologization", we will trace the development of a therapeutic worldview and its establishment in Western culture. As Foster observes, the process of psychologization in the twentieth century begins with the development of the "therapeutic ethos" as one of many aspects of Western cultural life that gradually gains significance during the twentieth century, replacing the Protestant ethic as the primary form of legitimization of capitalist social relations (Foster 2015: 3–7). It is only with the radical cultural changes in the 1960s and the rise of neoliberalism that the therapeutic ethos articulates itself with the most significant institutions of the state and the economy, thus establishing itself as therapy culture and consequently becoming one of the primary forms of knowledge through which social relations are reproduced (Foster 2016).

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the psychological troubles affecting them in the private sphere due to the influence of patriarchal norms Wright (2008: 331–333). However, within feminist theory, criticisms of therapy culture have also emerged, claiming that its discourses divert attention from political and economic structures to manifestations of patriarchy in women's personal lives Sommers and Satel (2005).

5   Warwick Tie noticed a similar deficiency in contemporary research of self-help literature Tie (2004).

As the Marxist researcher De Vos claims, psychological knowledge has had exceptional significance for the development of capitalism since its very beginning. He relies on Foucault's research of disciplinary forms of power and their relationship with the development of subjectivity in the early modern period, arguing that psychological knowledge was crucial for the development of institutions such as prisons and mental asylums (De Vos 2012: 94–96). These institutions, as Foucault observes, contribute to the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production by subjecting individuals to a specific model of subjectivity. This model entails subjectivity that internalizes institutional norms and manages its behavior in an efficient and predictable manner (Foucault 1995: 135–169; Foucault 2006). Therefore, psychological knowledge has played a role since capitalism's very beginning in creating reflexive and responsible subjects who can successfully participate in the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production.

However, researchers of therapy culture claim that psychological knowledge gained a decisive role in the reproduction of social relations only in the twentieth century[6]. Marxist theorist Lears argues that at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the marketing industry started increasingly relying on therapeutic discourses. Specifically, he points out that during this period, therapeutic discourses were increasingly used to stimulate consumption, heralding significant cultural changes (Lears 1983: 3–4). According to Lears, at this time, commodities were increasingly advertised as means to fulfill consumers' emotional needs. More precisely, he claims that the development of a mass society led to a subjective need among citizens to achieve authenticity. This resulted in the therapeutic ethos assuming the role of cultural hegemony, established through the sphere of marketing, where various products are advertised as means to satisfy this need (Lears 1983: 6–12). Psychologist Cushman observes something similar and calls this form of advertising "life-style marketing", claiming that the therapeutic ethos played a significant role in its creation. This type of marketing implies that products are presented as tools for personal identity transformation, aiming to achieve a state of psychological satisfaction and harmony[7] (Cushman 1990).

The next significant phase in the development of therapy culture can be observed in the mid-twentieth century. Sociologist Barbara Wootton already noted in 1959 that in many state institutions, such as those within the criminal justice system, there was an increasing reliance on expertise provided by

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6 Researchers often note that therapy culture in the USA has its roots in the "New Thought Movement". This movement was founded in the early 19th century and was dedicated to promoting the idea that the cure for various physical illnesses and personal problems can be found in changing people's beliefs and mindsets. These ideas were called "the mind cure" and were a combination of religious and psychological discourses Moskowitz (2001: 10–29; Rakow 2013).

7 Psychoanalytic knowledge has played a significant role in shaping the modern marketing industry since the interwar period, as evidenced by the fact that this industry has its origins in the work of Freud's son-in-law, Edward Bernays see Packard (2007).

psychologists and psychiatrists[8] (Wootton 1959: 17). Foucauldian theorist Jacques Donzelot claims that psychoanalytic knowledge was adopted in France during the 1930s by state institutions responsible for family welfare and crime prevention (Donzelot 1979: 188–198). During the 1960s, the first academic works dedicated to the influence of psychological knowledge on culture emerged. Here, we primarily refer to Berger's article on the influence of psychoanalysis on everyday life[9] but also to the famous monograph by Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*.

According to Rieff, the therapeutic ethos has replaced religion as the primary worldview during the first half of the twentieth century in the United States. Drawing on Durkheim, he claims that every culture contains a "sacred order", a set of moral obligations that harmonize individual aspirations with community needs (Rieff 1966: 11–13). Rieff argues that post-war American society is characterized by the decline of religion and the weakening of social bonds, leading to the growing importance of psychological expertise. This results in the emergence of the "psychological man" as a new modal personality, which Rieff describes as an individual solely focused on their own psyche and personal emotional needs (Rieff 1966: 24–38). According to Rieff, the development of this modal personality leads to the atomization of contemporary society due to the breakdown of the moral order that aligns personal aspirations with collective needs (Rieff 1966: 258–261).

Inspired by Rieff's work, the historian Christopher Lasch develops his thesis that the influence of the therapeutic ethos on culture results in the emergence of the narcissistic personality as a new cultural model of subjectivity. According to Lasch, the Fordist mode of regulation erodes local and familial social relations, leading to the development of state agencies that oversee the institution of the family. This, alongside frequent fluctuations in the economy that cause economic insecurity for many citizens, results in the establishment of the therapeutic ethos as the primary worldview, according to Lasch (Lasch 1991: 1–30). He claims that this worldview prescribes an explicit focus on the individual's psychological life, their mental well-being, health, and self-realization (Lasch 1991: 31–51). The therapeutic worldview gradually became intertwined with the countercultural movement during its peak in the 1960s.

We can say that during this period, the therapeutic ethos articulated with what Boltanski and Chiapello termed the "artistic critique of capitalism". They claim this form of critique was dominant during the countercultural rebellion

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8   Rose claims that after World War II, state institutions started increasingly relying on psychological and psychiatric expertise because these disciplines had proven useful for managing the military during the war Rose (1999: 1–39).

9   Berger's article primarily refers to the everyday lives of American citizens Berger (1965). Eva Illouz claims that therapy culture primarily originated in the USA, and she points to Freud's lectures at Clark University in 1909 as a moment of its inception. According to Illouz, these lectures mark the beginning of the articulation of psychoanalytic knowledge and individualism typical for American society, resulting in therapy culture Illouz (2008: 22–57).

of the sixties and was based on criticizing capitalism for stifling individuality, creativity, and self-expression (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 167–217). Lasch claims that due to the convergence of the therapeutic ethos with the counterculture, many prominent figures of the sixties radical movement later turned to various therapeutic and religious practices aimed at "discovering their authentic selves" (Lasch 1991: 6–9). The articulation of the therapeutic ethos with the counterculture leads us to the process of its establishment and development into therapy culture in neoliberalism.

Boltanski and Chiapello argue that the countercultural rebellion of the sixties fundamentally altered the mode of regulation as the artistic critique got incorporated into the new mode to legitimize capitalist social relations (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 217–342). This process converged with the emergence of neoliberalism, which restructured the organization of companies, transitioning them from pyramidally organized bureaucracies to adopting the model of a network and relying on flexible work arrangements, making employment more insecure as temporary and part-time forms of employment became normalized (Sennett 2006: 17–54).

Boltanski and Chiapello highlight that due to the development of neoliberalism, managers faced the problem of adequately motivating employees. This is precisely where the therapeutic ethos comes into play. It was established in companies as a governmental technology that articulates the motivations and actions of employees with the goals of the company by presenting work as an opportunity for self-realization, self-fulfillment, and the expression of personal identity (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 57–102).

Eva Illouz observes a similar role of the therapeutic ethos and argues that due to relying on the model of a network and the use of information technologies, companies in neoliberalism develop a "communicative spirit". In other words, interpersonal relationships, communication, and collaboration become crucial in newly established enterprises, thus developing communication skills and empathy among employees becomes extremely important. For this reason, Illouz claims that managers turn to psychological expertise to cultivate an empathetic and reflective subjectivity among employees, as work in these companies requires constant reflection on one's own and other's emotions (Illouz 2007: 20–25). Therefore, she claims that subjectivity in neoliberal companies gains special significance, and the therapeutic ethos becomes a "scenario" or a cultural matrix guiding individuals in the workplace and articulating subjectivity with the enterprise by promising self-realization through work (Illouz 2007: 46–65).

Nikolas Rose observes that, parallel to the development of neoliberalism, there is a growing importance of psychological knowledge for governing citizens. He sees psychological knowledge as a discourse that enables "governing at a distance", meaning that due to the reduced role of state institutions in neoliberalism, citizens are now governed indirectly through agents such as psychological experts (Miller and Rose 2008: 142–172). Rose emphasizes that the aim of this form of governance is to establish a specific form of subjectivity

among citizens, which he calls "reflexive hermeneutics". This form of subjectivity involves continuous reflection by individuals on the contents of their psyche and the forming of their self-relationships in accordance with neoliberal norms (Rose 1996: 74–79).

Marxist-oriented theorists like Dana Cloud and James Nolan also notice the adoption of the therapeutic ethos by state institutions, parallel to the development of neoliberalism. Drawing on Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony, these authors emphasize that state institutions adopt the therapeutic ethos in order to influence citizens and transform them into self-responsible subjects who interpret personal failures and difficulties solely as caused by their own flawed psyche (Cloud 1998; Nolan 1998). Furedi observes the same and argues that since the 1980s, starting with the government of Margaret Thatcher, British state institutions dealing with unemployment have begun to rely on therapeutic discourses. However, according to him, the complete establishment of the therapeutic ethos occurred during the 1990s with the New Labour government in Britain and the presidency of Bill Clinton in the USA. Furedi sees this as a period when the therapeutic ethos becomes therapy culture, as it becomes the means of legitimizing state actions and institutions[10] (Furedi 2004: 94–100; 162–174).

While neoliberalism was being established the therapeutic ethos extended beyond companies and government institutions and infused itself into culture and the everyday lives of citizens. As Illouz and Rimke observe, in contemporary culture the therapeutic ethos manifests itself in numerous forms. This ethos can be found in various practices such as psychotherapy and group workshops, in cultural products like blogs, television and internet shows, but its most influential form, as many researchers note, is what is commonly referred to as "self-help literature" (Rimke 2017). Illouz conceptualizes this type of literature as an "emotional commodity" or "emodity", a cultural product through which the therapeutic ethos influences and modifies subjectivity (Illouz 2018: 1–30). Therefore, we can see self-help literature as a textual codification of the therapeutic ethos that influences subjectivity through the cultural sphere[11].

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10   During the 1990s and the early 2000s, international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations developed methods for assessing how various factors influence the level of happiness and mental health of the population. The assessment of the impact of mental health on economic development and GDP of different countries also started at this time Rose (2019: 134–149).

11   Sociologist Micki McGee claims that the self-help literature industry saw a tremendous surge during the development of neoliberalism, which she links to the economic insecurity caused by neoliberal reforms. For example, she highlights that the sales of self-help books doubled between 1972 and 2000, while in 1988 it was established that between 30% and 50% of US citizens had read at least one self-help book in their lifetime McGee (2005: 11–13). The research on the influence the therapeutic ethos has on culture extends beyond the examination of Western societies. Nehring et al. found that during the twenty-first century, there has been a rise in the popularity of self-help books in Third World countries, while numerous researchers like Thomas Matza point out the increasing significance of the therapeutic ethos in post-socialist societies. These

Sociologists Anthony Giddens and Jeffrey Alexander also observe the rising influence of the therapeutic ethos in the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century. According to these authors, the significance of therapeutic knowledge and practices in contemporary culture is on the rise due to the existence of a cultural imperative for continuous self-reflection. Therefore, therapeutic knowledge and practice become cultural resources that help individuals form their subjectivities but also influence the alleviation of the anxiety that accompanies this formation due to the decreasing significance of traditional models of subjectivity to which individuals use to aspire[12] (Giddens 1991: 32–34; Alexander 2009: 128–133).

Neoliberalism: Governmentality, Subjectivity, and Immaterial Production

Before we delve into constructing a theoretical framework to conceptualize the relationship between therapy culture and neoliberalism, we will present our interpretation of this mode of regulation. This interpretation will focus on the significance subjectivity has for neoliberalism and thus will serve as the starting point for developing the aforementioned theoretical framework.

While researching the emergence of neoliberalism, David Harvey largely relies on the theoretical perspective known as "the regulation school". This perspective focuses on the relationship between production, distribution, and consumption, claiming that these relationships must be stabilized for the economy to function adequately. The sets of factors that stabilize these relationships

studies precisely indicate that the development of the therapeutic ethos and its dissemination through culture accompanies the establishment of the neoliberal mode of regulation in these parts of the world Nehring et al. (2016: 8); Matza (2018). It is important to note that even though self-help literature gained in popularity with the development of neoliberalism it has a long history, and its contemporary forms have their origin in the work of early twentieth century authors like Norman Vincent Peale, Dale Carnegie and Napoleon Hill who combined business advice with the ideas of the "New Thought" movement Effing (2009: 130–131).

12   Tana Dineen cites data showing that between 1976. and 1995. the number of US citizens who visited a psychotherapist at least once increased from 22% to 46% of the total population Dineen (2001: 9). Apart from the rise in the number of users of psychotherapeutic services the development of neoliberalism is accompanied by the emergence of what Ashley Frawley calls "therapeutic industries". She uses this term to refer to heterogeneous networks of actors such as academics, activists, organizations, advocacy groups, and policymakers who promote a specific type of problematization of various aspects of the psyche as solutions to certain social and personal problems Frawley (2024: 67–69). Examples of these industries include the "self-esteem movement", popular from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s Hewitt (1998), "the happiness movement", which arises under the influence of a psychological subdiscipline called "positive psychology" and is popular during the 2000s Frawley (2015); Cabanas and Illouz (2019), "the mindfulness movement" that reached the peak of its popularity during the 2010s Purser (2019); Frawley)2024: 77–116), and "the mental health movement" that became popular towards the end of 2010s Frawley (2024: 129–188).

are called "modes of regulation" and consist of various elements such as in-stitutions, laws, norms, as well as processes of socialization for workers and other economic actors, which create the appropriate psychological motivation for participating in economic activities (Boyer 1990; Harvey 1992: 121–123).

In the period following the Great Depression and the emergence of the New Deal, Western economies adopted the so-called "Fordist" mode of regulation. This mode entails strong state regulation of the economy, policies aiming at full employment, as well as state-funded services like healthcare and educa-tion. Investments in Fordism are long-term and aimed at ensuring stable eco-nomic growth and long-term profits (Harvey 1992: 132–135). This resulted in the mass production of standardized products, while companies were orga-nized, as Sennett argues, according to "military" principles. This means that companies were bureaucratically regulated with employees having clearly de-fined positions and tasks, while career advancement involved gradual promo-tion within the hierarchical structure of the company (Sennett 2006: 20–25). Due to such organization, managers during the Fordist period were advised to motivate employees by guaranteeing secure and stable advancement in the company's hierarchy (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 86–89).

The rigidity of the Fordist mode of regulation led to stagflation during the 1970s, causing this mode to fall into crisis, which in turn led to the restruc-turing of the economy and the emergence of neoliberalism. Harvey refers to neoliberalism as "flexible accumulation", while another popular term for it is "post-Fordism". During the emergence of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the labor market also underwent restructuring due to the decline in union power, which employers exploited to promote new forms of temporary and part-time em-ployment. The popularization of such forms of employment is a result of the newly arisen high competition in the labor market (Harvey 1992: 150).

The organization of production also underwent drastic changes under neo-liberalism, which involved a shift towards production for differentiated market niches and meeting rapidly changing market demands. This allowed compa-nies to have faster turnovers, leading to a shift towards short-term investment. These changes were facilitated by the development of information technol-ogies as well as the emergence of a new global financial system, which began in the seventies with the breakdown of the Bretton Woods agreement. In the new financial system, capital is no longer constrained by space and time in its search for new profits (Harvey 1992: 156–165; Harrison 1994).

The changes in the organization of production went hand in hand with changes in the organization of companies. As Sennett points out, in neolib-eralism, companies transition from hierarchical to flexible networked orga-nizations, which allows them to adapt relatively quickly to changing market demands (Sennett 2006: 37–54). Such changes are also accompanied by al-terations in the forms of socialization of the workforce. Namely, the chang-es in the organization of companies have caused motivational issues among employees, as discussed by Boltanski and Chiapello. These issues led to the development of a new business culture that articulates employee motivation

with the needs of the company through ideas of self-realization, self-fulfill-ment, and self-expression (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 90). Managers be-gin to present work in the company as an opportunity to find meaning and happiness, leading to what Fleming calls "neo-normative control". He claims that neoliberal companies rely on worker self-discipline, meaning that work-ers internalize the appropriate motivation to align their subjectivity with the company's demands (Fleming 2009: 67). Fleming argues that this self-disci-pline is achieved through what he calls "just be yourself" discourse, implying that work in the company is presented as a means of achieving authenticity (Fleming and Sturdy 2009: 573–574).

Our understanding of neoliberalism is based on Foucault's theoretical ap-paratus and his analysis of neoliberalism in the course *The Birth of Biopoli-tics* (*Naissance de la biopolitique*). The main Foucauldian concept we will rely on is the "apparatus" (*dispositif*) which he defines as a heterogeneous set of discourses, practices, and norms whose role is to regulate various institutions and coordinate their functioning through a unified logic or rationality (Fou-cault 1980: 194). This rationality entails a unified system of norms that govern the actions of subjects by influencing their subjectivity. Specifically, Foucault uses the concept of "subjection" to denote how various practices within dif-ferent institutions of the apparatus align individual's actions with its rational-ity (Foucault 1995: 30). In governmentality theory these practices are termed "governmental technologies" and are described as operating through influenc-ing subjectivity, i.e. the way individuals govern their own behavior (Miller and Rose 2008: 32–34). The relationship between subjection and subjectivity is the point at which what Foucault calls technologies of domination and technolo-gies of the self intersect; here, the way subjects govern themselves is linked to how governmental technologies affect them[13].

The Fordist mode of regulation corresponds to what Foucault calls the "apparatus of discipline". He uses the metaphor of the "panopticon" to illus-trate the rationality of this apparatus. The panopticon can be seen as a virtual instance that serves to legitimize and enforce various governmental technol-ogies that enact subjection within this apparatus (Foucault 1995: 195–230). The role of this instance is to represent various social wholes, like a company, to which the individual adapts in the process of subjection by internalizing

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13   An important element of a Foucauldian theoretical framework is the notion of re-sistance, which Foucault defines as the autonomization of subjectivity. In other words, it is a process through which the way subjects govern their behavior becomes indepen-dent, and their practices turn against the rationality of the apparatus they were subject-ed to Foucault (2009: 191–227). Even though the phenomena of resistance won't be the focus of this article, it is important to mention that some authors see elements of ther-apy culture as potentially contributing to the possibilities of creating resistance prac-tices. For example, Gloria Steinem in her book *Revolution from Within* claims that self-help books could positively influence individuals to reclaim their self-esteem and consequently engage in social activism that is aimed at bringing about progressive social change Steinem (1993).

certain norms through which they regulate their subjectivity and behavior (Foucault 1980: 146–165).

In contrast to this, the neoliberal apparatus in Foucault's view doesn't contain a transcendent figure represented by the panopticon. He names the apparatus that governs the neoliberal mode of regulation "the apparatus of security", emphasizing its role in organizing institutions to ensure optimal conditions for subjects to act "freely" (Foucault 2008: 255–260). In other words, this means that the relationship subjects form with themselves becomes the direct correlate of governmental technologies and an instance from which the legitimation of the process of subjection is derived. In neoliberalism, according to Foucault, subjection and subjectivity merge into one[14].

The governmental technology that combines subjection and subjectivity in neoliberalism Foucault calls "the homo oeconomicus" and describes it as a model of subjectivity into which neoliberal governmental technologies try to fit individuals by regulating institutions. The goal of these technologies is thus to incentivize individuals to adopt this model so that they further reproduce neoliberal rationality within their own subjectivity (McNay 2009: 62–63). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's work in *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault describes homo oeconomicus as a "machine" and claims that this model of subjectivity requires individuals to organize their lives in accordance with the "logic of an enterprise" (Foucault 2008: 226). He argues that this model is based on the theory of "human capital"[15] and claims that individuals who adopt it begin to perceive their various skills, as well as health, mental processes, social relationships and interactions, as units of capital that must be managed to ensure the maximization of certain forms of income[16] (Foucault 2006: 226–233). This means that homo oeconomicus functions as a "machine" that transforms elements of subjectivity and individuals' personal lives into economic value.

The significance that subjectivity gains in the neoliberal mode of regulation is explained by Hardt and Negri who claim that neoliberalism is primarily based on so-called "immaterial production". By immaterial production they mean various forms of knowledge creation, manipulation of symbols, different forms of communication and formation of social relations, as well as work based on affectivity and emotions (Hardt and Negri 2000: 289–300). Hardt and Negri point out that in neoliberalism these forms of work take precedence due to the incorporation of information technologies into the work process and the dominance of the service sector (Hardt and Negri 2000: 280–289). This

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14   As Anthony Elliott claims, in neoliberalism individuals are "subjects to themselves" Elliott (2004: 35–38). By trying to reformulate the notion of the panopticon, Zygmunt Bauman terms the fusion of subjection and subjectivity in neoliberalism "the synopticon" Bauman (2000: 85–86).
15   When analyzing the theory of human capital, Foucault mostly relies on the work of economists Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz.
16   Foucault claims that in the work of neoliberal-oriented economists, income is not understood solely as monetary profit but can also take other forms, such as psychological satisfaction Foucault (2008: 244).

means that in neoliberalism subjectivity and numerous psychological process-
es get incorporated into the production process, indicating that they are now
involved in the creation of surplus value (Lazzarato 1996).

For this reason, there arises a need in neoliberalism for governmental tech-
nologies that function akin to what Rose calls "ethopolitics", i.e., through the
construction of techniques for self-transformation and self-assessment aimed
at adapting subjectivity to its incorporation into the process of capital repro-
duction (Rose 2007: 27). Therapy culture comes into play here, and in the fol-
lowing segment we will focus on constructing a theoretical framework to con-
ceptualize its role in the process of subsuming subjectivity into the process of
surplus value creation in the neoliberal mode of regulation.

Therapy Culture as a Neoliberal Technology of the Self and a Regime of Desire

If we rely on Foucault's theoretical framework, therapy culture in neoliberal-
ism could be conceptualized as a phenomenon located at the intersection of
technologies of domination and technologies of the self. More precisely, ther-
apy culture could be understood as a technology of the self[17] that functions as a
governmental technology in the neoliberal apparatus. Thus, from a Foucauldi-
an perspective, therapy culture can be seen as a neoliberal technology of the
self that subjects use in the process of transforming their subjectivity in accor-
dance with the model of homo oeconomicus.

Therefore, in neoliberalism therapy culture plays the role of what Foucault
in his study of Ancient Greek thought calls "the culture of the self", that is,
a set of practices and discourses through which individuals transform them-
selves into subjects in a particular historical period (Foucault 2024: 89). This
understanding aligns with the claims of the sociologist Ashley Frawley, who
sees therapy culture as aiming to transform ethnopsychology, i.e., as a govern-
ing technology of neoliberalism that aims to alter how individuals delineate
between desirable and undesirable psychological processes such as motivation,
emotions, cognition, etc. (Frawley 2020: 143–144; Frawley 2024: 21–22). Thus,
therapy culture in neoliberalism plays the role of an "episteme of subjectivi-
ty", making aspects of an individual's psyche intelligible to them and shaping
their relationship with themselves and their behavior (Merquior 1985: 128).

However, this conceptualization suffers from the aforementioned problem
identified by Dolar in his article on Althusser, namely, it fails to explain how ther-
apy culture mobilizes subjects to utilize the knowledge it contains to transform
their subjectivity. Glynos and Howarth also acknowledge this problem and em-
phasize that Foucault's conceptualization of the apparatus must be supplemented

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17   Foucault defined technologies of the self as technologies "…which permit individ-
uals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of oper-
ations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to
transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom,
perfection, or immortality" Foucault (1988: 18).

with an appropriate "logic of fantasy" that would explain how subjects decide to align their actions with its rationality. By the logic of fantasy, they mean an intersubjective system of meaning that guides subjects towards a libidinal investment in a particular model of subjectivity (Glynos and Howart 2007: 145–152).

A similar assertion is made by the post-operaist theorist Frédéric Lordon when he claims that every apparatus must be complemented by an appropriate "regime of desire"[18] through which the apparatus inscribes itself into the psyches of individuals[19] (Lordon 2014: 43). Like Glyons and Howarth, Lordon bases his ideas on the work of Jacques Lacan and his concept of "fantasy". Fantasy is a concept in Lacan's work that represents the intersection of three psychic registers: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. According to Lacan, individuals acquire a certain "lack" during their psychic development, which is the result of developing self-awareness and separating from the figure of the mother (Lacan 2006: 75–82). This lack, according to Lacan, manifests itself in the form of desire, which seeks to satisfy that lack by forming a certain kind of subjectivity. This desire is what he calls the register of the real (Lacan 2006: 575–584; Chiesa 2007: 104–140). The symbolic, in Lacan's understanding, represents cultural codes within which the figure of the "Big Other" is formed as a virtual instance that presents individuals with certain demands whose fulfillment would lead to the formation of a specific identity (Chiesa 2007: 34–69). The imaginary is the register that contains ideas individuals have of themselves, that is, their conscious self-relationship (Chiesa 2007: 13–34).

According to Lacan, all three registers are interrelated, and at their intersection lies what he calls the "object petit a" or the object the subject experiences as what can fulfill the lack present in their psyche (Lacan 1999: 108–136). Here, the fantasy comes into play, which we can see as a set of discourses and representations whose role is to initiate the subject's striving for acquiring the "object petit a" (Žižek 2008: 7). It achieves this by articulating the subject and the Big Other through the ego-ideal, i.e., through a model of subjectivity presented to the subject as a way of organizing subjectivity that must be realized if the subject wants to meet the demands of the Big Other (Žižek 2006: 79–81).

Fantasy can therefore be seen as a scenario through which the subject is presented with an answer to the demands of the Big Other (Flisfeder 2023: 177–178). This answer takes the form of a certain identity whose acquisition fantasy presents as a path towards the realization of desire. Therefore, fantasy functions through the regulation of libidinal investments, directing subjects

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18   Lordon refers to this regime of desire as "epithumia" based on the ancient Greek term ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ which translates to desire or longing Lordon (2014: 78). With this term Lordon provides a reinterpretation of Foucault's concept of the episteme, which refers to a structure governing discursive practices within a particular historical context. In Lordon's framework, epithumia is understood as similarly regulating desires.
19   Lordon compares his understanding of the regime of desire with Bourdieu's concept of "illusio", which he uses to denote the way in which a particular social field mobilizes individuals to participate in struggles over those forms of capital considered valuable in that field Lordon (2014: 43).

towards internalizing the demands of the Big Other in the form of the ego-ideal that subsequently assumes the role of the superego within the individual's psyche (Lacan 2006: 645–670).

Building on this understanding of fantasy, we can adequately supplement our conceptualization of therapy culture as a technology of the self to explain how it mobilizes subjects to transform their subjectivity in accordance with the norms it contains. We can say that therapy culture constructs, within its discourses, the model of subjectivity of homo oeconomicus whose adoption and realization it presents as a means to achieve a state of happiness, success, self-fulfillment, self-realization, and the like (Cederström 2019). In contrast to the situation in the disciplinary apparatus where the Big Other, as the equivalent of the panoptic instance representing the social whole or the symbolic order, imposes demands on the subject to achieve a certain identity, in neoliberalism, the state of happiness, success, and self-fulfillment assumes the role of an ego-ideal (Miller 2005; Tutt 2022: 34–36). The model of subjectivity of homo oeconomicus and the knowledge contained in therapy culture therefore function as means to achieve the ego-ideal and thus attain the object of desire (Tie 2004: 162–163).

Lacan's theory of discourse can be interpreted as his attempt to map the logics of different fantasies. In his seminar number XVII titled *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* he lists four such discourses[20], and later in his work he adds a fifth one named "the discourse of capitalism". The logic of fantasy established by the discourse of capitalism implies that various commodities are presented to subjects as means to achieve certain identities and thus to satisfy lack or fulfill desire (Bryant 2008: 16–17; Vanheule 2016: 6–9). We thus observe that the role of the therapeutic ethos in the early stages of consumer capitalism, as noted by Lears and Cushman, was precisely to contribute to the diffusion of this fantasy through the culture. However, in the case of neoliberalism, therapy culture assumes a role in establishing a different logic of fantasy. This fantasy presents various modifications of subjectivity and the psyche as a path to the object of desire (Dufour 2008: 71), and therapy culture emerges as a technology of the self through which these modifications can be achieved (Binkley 2014).

Therefore, therapy culture as a technology of the self with a phantasmatic dimension emerges in neoliberalism as a mediating instance between subjects and the process of capital accumulation. Its role lies precisely in directing individuals to modify their subjectivity in such a way that their libidinal investments and psychic processes could be incorporated into the production of surplus value. In other words, drawing on Søren Mau's understanding of economic power, we can say that therapy culture is a technology that transforms subjectivity and psychic processes through the logic of valorization, thereby making them variables in capital accumulation (Mau 2023: 134).

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20   The four discourses that Lacan mentions during this seminar are: the discourse of the master, the discourse of the university, the discourse of the hysteric, and the discourse of the analyst Lacan (2007).

Conclusion

By conceptualizing therapy culture as a combination of technologies of the self and a regime of desire, we aimed to address a deficiency noted in previous critical studies on the relationship between therapy culture and neoliberalism. This deficiency involves the inability of the theoretical frameworks previous research was based on to explain how therapy culture articulates subjectivity with norms governing institutions in neoliberalism. Therefore, by constructing our theoretical framework, we aimed to conceptualize the role therapy culture has in mobilizing subjects to adopt the norms of the neoliberal apparatus and participate in institutions governed by its rationality.

Our conceptualization of therapy culture also contributes to a better understanding of how neoliberalism regulates the articulation of subjectivity and the capitalist regime of accumulation. We have conceptualized therapy culture as a mediating instance that regulates how libido is invested in the economic sphere and thus how subjectivity and psychic processes become elements in the process of surplus value creation (Deleuze 2004: 263). In his famous article "Postscript on the Societies of Control" Deleuze claims how new generations must discover "what they're being made to serve" in a society that has abandoned the disciplinary apparatus (Deleuze 1992: 7). We can conclude that our conceptualization of therapy culture precisely contributes to shedding light on new forms of domination that are today often presented as forms of freedom and opportunities for achieving happiness.

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Milan Urošević

Terapijska kultura i proizvodnja subjektivnosti u neoliberalizmu

Apstrakt:

Ovaj članak istražuje odnos između neoliberalizma i fenomena "terapijske kulture". Terapijsku kulturu definišemo kao posledicu širenja ideja, diskursa i praksi iz psihologije i psihoterapije u različite sfere društva. Prethodna istraživanja, oslanjajući se na kulturalnu sociologiju, marksizam i teoriju upravljanja, nisu adekvatno adresirala kako terapijska kultura integriše subjektivnost sa institucijama neoliberalnog modusa regulacije. Počinjemo sa istorijskim pregledom evolucije terapijske kulture kroz dvadeseti vek i njenom ulogom u neoliberalnim ekonomskim reformama. Naša analiza zatim prelazi na konceptualizaciju neoliberalnog modusa regulacije, ističući ulogu koju subjektivnost ima u njemu. Konačno, predlažemo teorijski okvir koji integriše Fukoove "tehnologije sopstva" i Lakanov koncept "fantazma" kako bismo konceptualizovali odnos između neoliberalizma i terapijske kulture. Oslanjajući se na ovaj okvir, zaključićemo da terapijska kulture služi kao tehnologija upravljanja kroz koju neoliberalizam integriše subjektivnost u proces akumulacije kapitala.

Ključne reči: subjektivnost, terapijska kultura, neoliberalizam, dispozitiv, Fuko, Lakan, fantazam, tehnologije sopstva.