Comments and Questions
GCABSS 2020

Paper No. 201215

Dear Discussants, thank you very much for your sophisticated, appreciative, and encouraging comments and insightful questions. No doubt, thinking these through will greatly benefit the development of the paper, which really is work-in-progress. Please find some preliminary answers to the questions you raised below.

Question No. 1
How would you define the concept of dynamic psychology?

Reply: Thank you for this important question. Dynamic approaches in psychology generally share attention to and emphasis of the interaction of different and possibly conflicting drives, tendencies, developments or trajectories on various levels of analysis (individual, groups, society). The term “psychodynamic” was originally coined by Sigmund Freud to describe the flows, manifestations, and conflicts of psychic energy in analogy to the “thermodynamic model”. Broadly speaking, psychodynamic here refers to various strands of psychoanalytic theorizing. When we talk about socio-dynamic processes, however, this can be seen as an extension of psychodynamic thinking to processes at the social and societal level. Notably, a similar approach as in psychodynamic psychology was developed on the societal level by Karl Marx. Most notably, this becomes evident in his theorizing on class conflict, revolutions and change in societies. Hence, the parallels and affinities between psychoanalysis and social critique. In particular, this convergence between psycho- and socio-dynamic theory was developed and elaborated on by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory in the social philosophy of Freudo-Marxism, which is essentially a combination of psychodynamic and socio-dynamic thinking and theorizing. Thus socio- and psychodynamic approaches, as we the them, mean attention to the nested dynamic interactions of tendencies and trajectories on, across, and among different levels of economy, society, organizations, and the psyche of groups and individuals. This is a more holistic and integrative approach, compared to more “static” mainstream psychology, fitting to the complex and dynamic multi-level model we are suggesting.

Exemplary for this idea to connect and interactively examine social and psychological dynamics is social character theory by social philosopher and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, explaining how socio-economic structures of societies shape the formation of shared personal orientations and psychological character structures among the members in a way that people seem to voluntarily “want to do” what they “should do” to benefit the interest of powerful ruling elites (investors,
managers, politicians, bureaucrats). Ideal-types of social character in historical phases of political-economic system have been proposed, such as hoarding, receptive, authoritarian, and marketing character. Accordingly, societies permit or promote, respectively, inhibit, impede, or undermine realization of human potentials for well-being and psychological development. Based on humanistic social psychology, advanced capitalist societies are evaluated as psychologically “insane”, promoting destructive (e.g., egoism, greed, rivalry) and impeding “productive” behavior and character orientations (e.g., altruism, dedication, growth). Fromm’s analysis of the self-focused and deformed “marketing character” of postindustrial societies reflects other critical sociocultural assessments, such as the corrosion of character attested by R. Sennett (see below). In any case, this is an exemplary case of combining a dynamic psychological approach (psychoanalysis) with a dynamic conception of societies and social systems (social critique) and a role model for the socio-psychodynamic approach to power and control we are seeking to develop here.

References: Dynamic Psychology

Question No. 2
Can you please explain concisely about the relationship between "autopoietic" and "emergent"?

Reply: Thank you. That is also a very good question. Both are technical terms that refer to important and related concepts in systems theory. Autopoiesis means that complex systems are not static, but have the inherent ability to dynamically adapt, maintain and reproduce themselves in response to internal and external stimuli, i.e., growing and extending beyond its previous boundaries. Autopoiesis thus can be described as a form of organic self-organization, lending complex systems almost similar qualities as living organisms.

Emergence means that systems can develop new properties that they did not possess before and that cannot be predicted from the previous configuration of components of the system. It is an important extension of the idea that a system is more than the sum of its part (also: $1 + 1 = 3$), or than quantitative change turns into qualitative transformation, which is also a core principle of dialectics in Historical Materialism (Marxism).

Autopoiesis can lead to emergence of new system properties, yet, this not a must. The system could also just repair and maintain itself. Concurrently, emergence does not have to be a matter of autopoiesis (i.e., intrinsic self-organization), but could also derive from interaction (e.g.,
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merging) of different systems or other external stimuli (e.g. disturbances). So, I hope I could make clear, how the two concepts are related but distinct. However, these are complex concepts and any answer I could give here is necessary simplified and incomplete. Additionally, below references might be helpful.

References: Systems Theory

Question No. 3
Can you please provide a few practical examples of implications of dynamics and discourses of force in contemporary societies, organizations, and individuals under the progressively intrusive and corrosive mental regime of neoliberal governance striving for supremacy?

Reply: Yes, Thank you. Indeed, what we mean to here are all kinds of developments that contribute to the (more or less coercive or manipulative) adaptation of humans to economic requirements of workplaces, markets, and societies. For instance, if people increasingly connect their sense of self-worth to their „labor market value“ as employees, internalizing external demands to become certain personality characteristics. This tendency of the economic societal system to “produce appropriate individuals” has, among others, been described in social character theory. However, work on advanced neoliberal governmentality describes similar processes, whereby the minds of employees are the targets of efficient control and manipulation. The main argument here is that people are used, influenced and “formed” (or domesticated) according to ends or objectives that are not in their own best interests and do not contribute to their wellbeing and psychological development, but support the accumulation of capital and the stabilization of (a crisis-prone) economic system and the societal elites profiting from its maintenance and continuous expansion, that is, by appropriating power and profit.

Reference: Social Character

With regard to your question about practical examples, I want to briefly mentioned three discourses: b) the internalization of organizational (labor market) flexibility requirements by employees, as described in the classic work of Sennett as “corrosion of character”, and also evident in mainstream research on “employability”; b) the second example I want to give are corporate “mindfulness” programs, which are by definition, very intrusive, aiming to manipulate
the very psychology of employees to make the “better performers” or “resistant to overwork and strain” etc. And, finally, recent work on the “quantified self” has shown how employees (are made to) use self-tracking technologies to “rationalize” and modify themselves according to the interests and specifications of their employers. Of course, this is a complicated topic, yet, many authors converge in their assessment of the intrusiveness, danger and harm of remodeling the human psyche according the demands of the economy, which has also been described (based on Foucault) in the concepts of biopower and biopolitics in advanced neoliberal regimes of work. Please find some references on the above three examples below. Again, thank you for your interest and helping us to reflect on and better develop these ideas.

References: Intrusive Flexibility (Example 1)

References: Mindfulness Programs (Example 2)

References: Quantified Self (Example 3)

Reference: Biopower and governmentality (General)