On the Aesthetics of Self Expression: Technological Milieu and Threats to the Future of Theoretical Psychology

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Abstract

Theoretical psychology is at its best when it engages in the wider psychological community by bringing about critical reflection and synthesis. This vision is challenging to accomplish due to "anesthesia": a practice of 'comatose' production divorced from authentically generative activity and meaningful engagement with others. This notion is developed by drawing on Marcuse's discussion of the surplus of suppression enabled by technology and a hyperreal milieu. Technological practices such as the engineering of social media platforms maximize anesthesia and amplify such concerns. I advocate for a turn to Bakhtinian aesthetics of self-expression to spell out an aesthetic for theoretical psychology.

Keywords: technology, Bakhtin, Marcuse, theoretical psychology, aesthetics

Introduction

Theoretical psychology, as a discipline, was first envisioned in 1932 by Lindworski who claimed that it should engage the wider psychological community. Researchers in the general discipline generate countless studies arranged side-by-side and his vision was for theoretical psychologists to critically reflect upon and synthesize the implications for what we know about humans. Half a century later, Royce (1982) delivered a presidential address for Division 24 (Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology) of the American Psychological Association and starts from the same position that a myriad of studies is insufficient without good theoretical reflection. Martin (2004) and Slife and Williams (1997) also spell out visions for theoretical psychology where scholars are engaged with researchers to critique

and enrich the discipline. What is more important, they envision how such engagement with the wider discipline of psychology is crucial to the ethos of theoretical psychology.

The purpose of this paper to is discuss what is challenging the realization in order to articulate what theoretical psychologists can do about it. Realizing this vision is challenged by what I'll refer to as *anesthesia*: a practice of 'comatose' scholarly production divorced from authentically generative activity and meaningful engagement with others. I develop this notion below via Herbert Marcuse (1974), who proposed that technologies of entertainment anesthetizes people and that *aesthetic* activity, in contrast, is generative and engaged with others. I will discuss how technological practices such as the engineering of social media platforms maximize anesthesia and amplify concerns raised by Marcuse in a way that poses are risk for scholarship in theoretical psychology. I will then bring together Marcuse and Mikhail Bakhtin's (1990) early work on the aesthetics of self-creation to spell out an aesthetic theoretical psychology.

Technological Milieu and Anesthesia

Marcuse (1974), a psychoanalytic philosopher, offers insight into the milieu in which theoretical psychologists find themselves. His ideas about the surplus of repression and performances principles will be described below and reframed through a socio-cultural orientation. That discussion allows for an orientation to my notion of anesthesia and the preferred form of practice of theoretical psychology that I will address in the next section on aesthetics.

Surplus of Repression and the Performance Principle

Marcuse (1974) introduces what he calls "the surplus of repression" to address how restrictions to pleasure involve more than its modification to get along in society. What he adds to Freud's discussion of the reality principle is a focus on the social constitution of scarcity. Resources and systems enabling the reality principle are, as a consequence, organized in light of socially constituted scarcity. He writes that

> … domination is exercised by a particularly group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged position. Such domination does not exclude technical, material, and intellectual progress, but only as an unavoidable byproduct while preserving irrational scarcity, want, and constraint. (pp. 36-37).

This domination is more than what is necessary to enable the functioning of societies and so he refers to *surplus* repression.

An important concept tied to the surplus of repression is what Marcuse (1974) refers to as the "performance principle". He uses this phrase to address how the surplus of repression facilitates the stratification of society because humans must perform in a way that reflects the economic drive within the surplus of repression. The performance principle means that people "… do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. While they work, they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties but work in alienation." (p. 45). Labor is for a system that inhibits agency.

Marcuse's (1974) claim rests upon the importance of the pursuit of phantasy. Phantasy spelled with a "Ph" is a psychoanalytic notion that entails pleasure marked by a high degree

of agency when people do what feels intrinsically rewarding. It is a term used to describe how people can find ways to develop themselves in personally enjoyable and rewarding directions. It involves labour that entwines with a sense of energy where one feels expanded and generative. That is, there may be many kinds of labour that are pleasurable from which a sense of purpose and intrinsic value can be derived.

The surplus of repression – i.e. more societal demands than are necessary for human social functioning – and the performance principle – i.e. modus operandi that people must perform their work to satisfy alienating socioeconomic power structures – taken together entail a psychoanalytic-Marxist expression of psychoanalytic theory. Marcuse (1974) thereby promotes a heavily social form of psychoanalytic thought (see also Brown, 1959). Phantasy is undermined by the social-structural machinery of the surplus of repression and performance principle. Phantasy involves a sense of alive-ness and engagement with activities where the surplus of repression and performance principles deaden oneself to one's own phantasy. I use the term *anesthesia* in light of such deadening.

Of course, there is a longstanding critique of the self-contained individualism inherent in psychoanalysis. Marcuse (1974) took a psychoanalytic-Marxist orientation, but I argue that we can consider his ideas through a sociocultural lens in line with critics of individualist psychanalysis. Proponents of this critique such as Billig (1999a&b) and Voloshinov (2012) argue that unconscious mechanisms are better understood as sociolinguistic practices. Both Billig (1999a&b) and Voloshinov (2012) write about the role of language in what are taken as psychodynamic phenomena. An individualist act like repression can be reframed as an interpersonal language activity. Both authors discuss the centrality of speaking and the co-construction of knowledge about phenomena like repression that leads to the joint production of what people come to know about their own psychodynamics. Language use enables a more radically social view of psychodynamic phenomena. Such an approach allows for a theory that does not fall prey to a reductionist romantic notion of a true mystical self that finds expression in labour.

This critique and alternative orientation to psychodynamic phenomena can be expanded to account for a rich notion of experience that goes beyond the construction of knowledge. It can include a sociocultural approach that addresses experiences such as lived tensions (Cresswell & Sullivan, 2020), struggles with faithfulness to oneself (Cresswell, 2011), and how the forgoing entwines with phenomena like virtue (Cresswell & Baerveldt, 2016). Pleasure is more than an epistemic language game because it is personally compelling although it can be understood as constituted in socio-communal participation. Being language animals (c.f. Taylor, 1999), human activity involves a socio-communal constitution of what is experienced as irreducibly good. Anesthesia is not about becoming deadened to one's own true core self on a sociocultural view and so I approach it as an alienation from this good.

Language enables embodied practices bound up in sentiments so that people enact a socio-communal expression of what one ought to do while also feeling the reward of realizing such oughts. Such communal goods

> …address how there are standards of excellence inherent in a practice. This position leads [… to the] claim that dynamic normative interpersonal correction necessitates something like a telos. … practices involve some sort of orchestrated direction. Entering into a practice is entering into acceptance of its inherent orchestrated direction. (Cresswell, & Baerveldt, 2016, p. 94).

That is, humans and their languages entail experiences of virtue revolving around ways of being and acting that are experienced as intrinsically rewarding (see Fowers, 2005; Murdoch, 1970). I argue that pleasure entailed in phantasy can be understood as virtue experienced in excellence in a sociocultural practice. It is deeply personal and compelling while also irreducibly sociocultural. Such a socio-cultural orientation to psychodynamics allows us to retain the psychologically constitutive role of culture while also accounting for the experiential psychodynamics of lived life. It also means that Marcuse can be read in a generative manner for contemporary theoretical psychologists.

Anesthesia is thereby an alienation from virtue. Marcuse (1974) contributes a means by which we can talk about the pleasure of such virtue as phantasy. It shows us how we can be in situations that inhibit the realization of virtue. People can settle for an ongoing experience of unpleasurable tension when we experience phantasy so conceived while simultaneously finding ourselves unable to realize phantasy (virtue). The surplus of repression and performance principle articulate social forces contrary to such communally constituted phantasy (virtue) and highlight how we settle for forms of social control in the monotony of production. Such a mode of activity amounts to an anesthetic mode of being.

Exploring the surplus of repression and performance principle in reference to theoretical psychology, moreover, requires a conversation about entertainment technology. Marcuse's (1974) point was that the surplus of repression and performance principle needs to be supported by some sort of apparatus. The key technological apparatus for supporting the performance principle at the time of his writing was the entertainment industry and so he writes that it is not

> …until the late stage of industrial civilization, when the growth of productivity threatens to overthrow the limits set by repressive domination, has the technique of mass manipulation developed an entertainment industry which directly controls leisure time, or has the state directly taken over the enforcement of such controls. (p. 48).

He explores how humans can feel a shallow kind of pleasure from entertainment that is designed to titillate and draw us into it so that experiences of alienation are not noticeable. We can become lost in the flow of the spectacle before us. Since this pleasure is short lived, humans must chase the unreal world presented to us in entertainment. The technology of entertainment is designed to keep our attention focused in an anesthetic state where we do not notice our experience of alienation. In light of a sociocultural orientation, this means that the people consume entertainment that offers a tantalizing presentation that subverts virtuous excellence with a manufactured simulacrum. Phantasy, so conceived, is overshadowed by a layer of superficiality supporting the surplus of repression and performance principles that leads to anesthesia.

A General Technological Milieu that Further Supports Anesthesia

Psychologists are just now beginning to study mobil devices, included applications, and their adaptive technologies, which puts psychologists a decade behind our current milieu. There is an abundance of robust and well-researched popular literature that is more up to date. Popular writers such as Tristan Harris (n.d.) and Jaron Lanier (2018) were both technology industry insiders (see Carr, 2011). Both authors write about our immersive

milieu in which application developers structure experience in such a way as to maximize what they refer to as "engagement": time spent on an application. The more time spent on a given application, the more information can be collected that can be used by companies to generate large data sets suitable for sale to corporations. According to Wu (2017) and Alter (2018), applications are designed to do more than passively harvest data for market researchers. Initially, social media applications, for example, passively collected data but their algorithms have been enhanced to engineer the desire to spend time on the application manipulate. Harris (n.d.) notes how longstanding findings from social psychology and neuroscience are used to adaptively customize an individual user's experience. That is, applications are designed to maximize engagement at seemingly any cost.

Consider common social media applications. Lanier (2018) writes about how applications are designed to manipulate neurochemistry in a way that creates positive emotionality when we first engage them. That is, application developers know that the manipulation of notifications and other features of the digital environment can trigger feel-good chemicals in the brain that are short-lived pleasures. What sustains our continued engagement is the provoking of emotional experience. When we feel the dis-ease that comes with our time in applications, they are designed to provide access to a customized experience oriented to manipulating whatever keeps us engaged. Lanier writes about Instagram, for example, tracking the dilation of one's pupils and the flush in the cheeks to note what can be presented to us in order to keep us engaged in the application. Snapchat tracks use in order to anticipate when one will become bored with the application and send notes to users that preempts an inclination to take a day away from the software. Facebook algorithms customize the information presented in a way that creates a filter bubble that stimulates emotions that prompt us to stay in the application.

Marcuse (1974) introduces how the surplus of repression and performance principle that are sustained by the entertainment industry. They lead to a kind of production that is divorced from phantasy in the service of socioeconomic systems and not for intrinsic enjoyment. My point is that the entertainment industry has changed to involve adaptive applications in a way that magnifies the observations made by Marcuse. The smooth flow of alienated production is something that our current technological milieu is ideally designed to support and has turned out to be more nefarious than Marcuse could have imagined. The use of the term *anesthesia* is an attempt to play with hyperbole and so direct attention to the potential magnitude of the current general milieu in which theoretical psychologists practice.

The foregoing has implications for theoretical psychology because technology and entertainment industries involve more than a bifurcated sphere of life distinct from other things that people do. Borgman (1993) prophetically illuminates the emergence of a comprehensive milieu in the early nineties, which was at the down of an advent of "…a technologically sophisticated and *glamorously unreal universe*, distinguished by its hyperreality" (p. 6; emphasis added). Technology enables a general milieu of hyperreality where human reality, "in comparison, is dirty and interminably ambiguous. And it moves at the deliberate pace of daily, seasonal, and generational rhythms" (p. 100). Borgmann sketches the consequences of hyperrealism in terms of a general milieu of sullenness and indolence. The comparative untidiness and dullness of life with others compels a retreat to hyperrealism marked by isolation, which enables a milieu of indolence in the face of the inability to ever get all of the information or see all of the available stimuli online. Hyperreal life leaves one without concern for complexity and tenacity needed to complete some sort of personal enterprise. Borgmann predicted the erosion of self-discipline and self-

government that marks sullen indolence and the emergence of a kind of self-righteousness. He notes that 'it's my choice' or 'I'm free to do what I want' may sound like responsibility, but it actually a sullen retreat away from life that amounts to a "refusal to discuss, explain, and justify a decision, and the retirement to self-indulgence." (p. 10). Anesthesia is marked by such a refusal to engage others that is propelled by hyperreality.

Borgmann (1993) shows how hyperrealism leads to a general milieu where communal ties are burdensome and communal dialogue becomes immobilized. Human thinking is entwined is a comprehensive milieu that is brilliant and rich in its highly pixilated representation and it is progressively more and more pliable in accordance with our desires. Hyperrealism enables a milieu of sullenness marked by "grimness and suspicion, to suffering within and belligerence without" (p. 81). The problem with the bypass of substance is that "conversation is without depth and wit; […it is] in roving and vacuous; […and its] sense of place is uncertain and fickle." (p. 108). His point is that the hyperreal environment sacrifices substance in favour of "one-dimensional score keeping" (p. 15) where it doesn't make sense to ask if one has learned something. It only makes sense to ask if there is a suitable token that may or may not stand for substance and, in so doing, settle for an anesthetic state of technocratic action without question of substance.

Marcuse (1974) offers insight into the surplus of repression and performance principle that is sustained by technologies to a degree more magnified than he envisioned. Borgmann (1993) highlights how hyperreality enables a general ethos of sullenness and indolence. This position is not intended to decry technology as a ubiquitous evil because there are also social goods that are enabled. Interpersonal and global connections enabled by technology are invaluable and information is accessible to a wide range of social classes that can more easily mobilize for the social good. As Harris (n.d.) notes, technologies can be used for the social good, but I'm concerned with the general kind of milieu that seems to be increasingly saturating late-modern life in which theoretical psychologists are situated. Our current hyperreality provided by applications puts us in a milieu that is immersive and progressively ubiquitous. I'm concerned with immersion in hyperreality and alienating modes of production that have implications for the pursuit of the virtues of theoretical psychology.

Implications: Anesthesia & Theoretical Psychology

There are indicators of anesthesia marked by the operation of the performance principle and surplus of repression in current efforts at research in psychology. P-hacking addresses the failure of many studies to replicate research and how many researchers run a gamut of analyses to see what turns out to be significant (John et al., 2012). HARKing involve Hypothesizing After the Results are Known and it involves generating hypotheses to fit significant results that are already known (Kerr, 1998). The Hoffman report chronicles the way that the American Psychological Association guidelines for ethical conduct were modified to support the Department of Defense in its use of torture, for which there was substantial financial gain (Hoffman et al., 2015). The current discussions about the replication crisis, the Hoffman Report, p-hacking, and the practice of HARKing all point to the operation of the performance principle. They highlight the economic imperatives driving a significant amount of research. They are indicators of the surplus of repression because a draconian commitment to statistical positivism suppresses work that may be rewarding and so these 'deviant' techniques become viable options. Hyperreality and anesthesia are enabled by abstraction through the use of operational definitions that offer a pristine view of concepts. We see a lack of substance – a long-standing critique offered by theoretical

psychologists – and sullen indolence in the form of research silos. The case can be made that anesthesia has is a mode of being that marks psychological research.

The issue remains as to whether theoretical psychology is an expression that inoculates itself from the general technologic milieu of the performance principle and surplus of repression. Does the hyperreal rhythm of life potentially propel theoretical psychologists into anesthesia and impoverish scholarship? The impact would be downplaying the virtue of engaging in theory across disciplinary lines in the manner spelled out above and there is potential for the answer to be 'yes'. The potential for an isolated industry of anesthetic production could include markers of the performance principle and surplus of repression. Consider the ISTP Proceedings going back to 2007. I looked at each chapter to see if I could find evidence that there either a current debate in wider psychology at stake or if there was some sort of practical psychological problem being explored. I classified the chapters as clearly engaging in some kind of problem in terms of engaging an-other framed as a body of research. I counted some chapters as borderline where it was hard to tell (e.g. they discussed general epistemological issues in psychology). I classified chapters as not engaging an other when I couldn't find engagement with a clear other (e.g. pontificated on a philosopher). The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of Articles Engaged with An Other
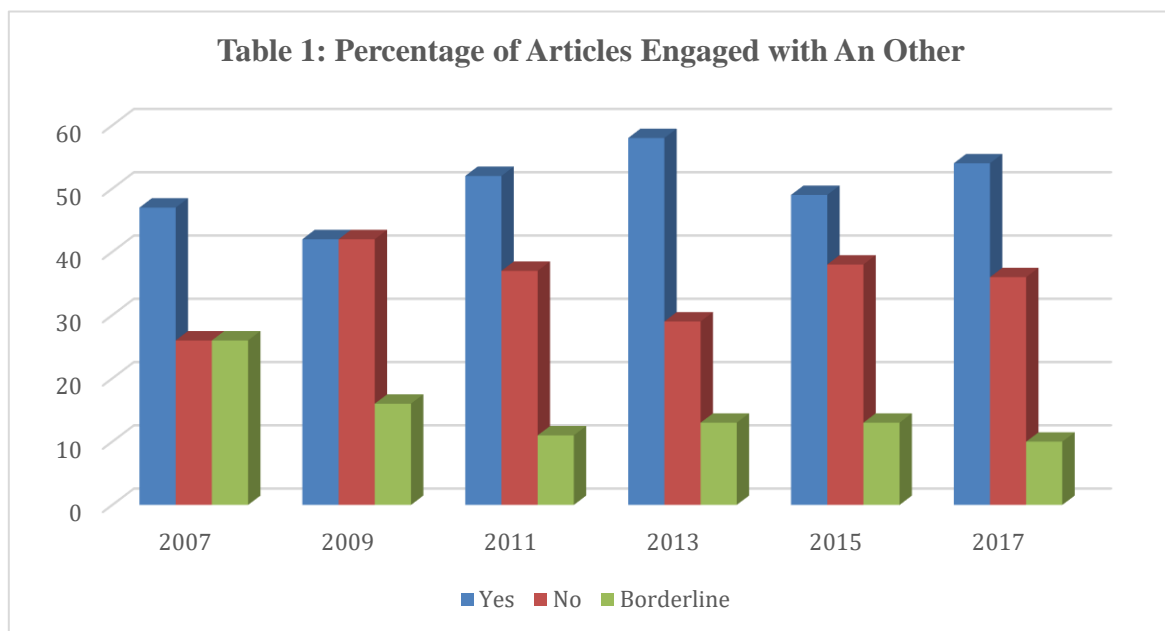
About half of the chapters in the proceedings engaged with a clear other outside the typical circles where society members publish. If we were to ask about how many of the articles engaged with mainstream psychology, about a quarter could be classified as having anything to do with the wider discipline. This number would be driven down very quickly if we removed general discussion of epistemology, which is the favoured target of theoretical psychologists. In general, there is engagement with an-other, but not overwhelmingly. Perhaps one cannot conclude that theoretical psychology is a silo and that reticence to engage with other psychologists are markers of full-blown anesthesia. Likewise, to conclude that there is a clear surplus of repression and performance principle at stake would be premature. There are grounds, however, to sound a warning that theoretical

psychologists ought to be critically reflective about potential alienation and the commodification of the discipline in light of our hyperreal milieu. Theoretical psychology runs the risk of a performance dulled to our own phantasy because there is a lack of engagement outside the borders of theoretical psychology and, potentially, an industry of indolent production. It is important to be reflexive about our potential anesthesia and so cast a vision for theoretical psychology that guards against it.

Aesthetics of Resistance

Following Lindworsky (1932) and authors such as Martin (2004), Royce, (1982), and Slife (2015), theoretical psychology is about the pleasure of the pursuit to address and challenge empirical practices by working through conceptual problems that are often ignored. Those who choose to work in theoretical psychology often see such engagement as a virtue: a good that resonates with the pursuit of phantasy. Anesthesia discourages such work due to the surplus of repression and performance principle that disengages researchers from phantasy. Marcuse (1974) treats art as the antidote to anesthesia and I will expand upon this claim by linking it to Bakhtin's aesthetics of self-expression with reference to implications for theoretical psychologists.

Aesthetics and Resistence

Marcuse (1974) argued that a key to pursuing phantasy is art and aesthetic experience, he argues, is deeply sensuous because art involves embodied experience where sensuality is entwined with seemingly abstract activities like reasoning. Engaging in art is more than entertaining hyperreal titilation because it is embodied in a way that involves more than good feelings. The sensuous experience in art runs counter to the surplus of repression and the performance principle because aesthetic acts are 'unrealistic'. They push back against what the experience and seemingly 'good sense' of hyperreality masquerading as ostensive reality. In this way, art can be understood as 'ineffective' in terms of functioning in line with the surplus of repression and performance principle because aesthetics involves how "…play and display now reveal their full distance from the values of productiveness and performances: play is *unproductive* and *useless* precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitive traits of labor and leisure; it 'just plays' with the reality." (p. 195). Art resists anesthesia whereas hyperreal entertainment (and our general technological milieu) supports it.

It is in this way that aesthetic activity mediates between embodied sensuality and reason that is dominated by surplus of repression and performance principle. We feel disjunction prompted by the experience of art that opens up possibilities other than hyperreality and so Marcuse writes that the "…truth of art is the liberation of sensuousness through its reconciliation with reason…" (1974, p. 184). Aesthetic acts enable freedom from constraints set by the performance principle and surplus of repression, which means the possibility of pondering phantasy is thereby enabled. That is, the loss of seriousness involves pleasure that can satisfy oneself without alienated labor buttressed by hyperreality. The result is that human activities can become an agentic manifestation of potentialities outside the struggle for existence and an implication, for the purposes of my argument, is that aesthetic life resists anesthetic modes of production.

Fortunately, aesthetics has been making a comeback in theoretical psychology and such work often takes a sociocultural view resonant with my approach (e.g. Cresswell, 2011;

Larrain, 2015; Larrain & Haye, 2019; Teo, 2015). Teo (2015) is a good illustrative example who discusses the possibility of aesthetics in a way that aligns well with Marcuse (1974). Drawing on the distinction between kinds of aesthetics, Teo (2015) notes that art can have a repressive function when it is "reduced to amusement in capitalist societies" (p. 305) and so resonates with Marcuse's discussion of the entertainment industry. Teo develops the liberating potential of art by noting how it can resist class and power because aesthetics is at the intersection of subjectivity and class power. Art involves persons' experiential engagement that inverts taken-for-granted normativity inherent in class and power structures. Subjectivity involves social machinery of subjectification and so any aesthetics engaging such subjectivity critically challenges and debases such machinery.

In line with a socio-communal orientation, Teo (2015) and Larrain (2015) note how art expresses the embodied oughts of a community that is entailed in its realization. It brings people to a place of awareness about communally shared virtues and the important questions about what kind of person one finds oneself to be. Aesthetics, as opposed to hyperreality, thereby resists the surplus of repression and performance principles. The most significant implication is that theoretical psychology ought to consider what it means to engage aesthetically as a form of resistance to anesthetic practice. An issue that consequently remains is how this vision can be sustained in theoretical psychology and this issue can be addressed through a discussed of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1990) early aesthetics.

Bakhtin's Aesthetics of Self-Expression

The notion of "self-expression" is a moniker that I derive from Bakhtin's (1990) early aesthetics read together with his later work on language (1981, 1984, 1986). His essay on speech genres is an ideal place to start because he outlines some important features of language that lie in the background of his early work (Bakhtin, 1986). Every genre of speech demarcates a community and it includes a particular jargon that members of a community generally express. Most notably, Bakhtin writes that this generic expression of language is more than mere pattern parochial communal lexicon that serves to merely demarcate a social group. Speech genres are ideological because, on the one hand, they note how one ought to express jargon. Participating as a member of a community means to express jargon in a stylistic manner that entails an experiential moral 'ought'. Looking at his work in Dostoevsky and especially his work on Rabelais helps us see that a speech genre is deeply embodied. That is, ideology in language use is experientially felt as virtue (see Cresswell & Baerveldt, 2016; Fowers, 2005). Bakhtin also was keen, on the other hand, to be clear that the expression of jargon is ideological in a sense that involves the way human ontologies are socio-communally constituted. Without language, there are no concepts and so a generic form of jargon used by a community constitutes the capacity to conceive, and thereby constitute, the world as it is manifestly experienced. Language involves ideology in the sense of how it constitutes oughts that frame what we take to be ostensive reality. The generic style of a community is entwined with a communal experience of what seems to truly be. My point is that there is an experientially powerful ideological valence to the manner in which a community's language constitutes ostensive reality.

Bakhtin (1981) is known for being someone that advocates a radical destabilization of individualist approaches to self and advocates for a dialogic approach to understanding humans, but his early work counterbalances a radical free play of discourses. His early work is where he writes about the "participative consciousness" and how one feels "compelled" to act in particular ways that are experientially anything but a free play of discourses (1990;

1993). His early work reads more like a phenomenology of compelled action because enacting a participative consciousness is enacting the speech genre of a community as-if it were an irreducible second nature. The consciousness that he discusses refers to the lived know-how that is enabled by participation in communities and so Bakhtin (1993) spends significant time exploring what it is like to live life in the flow of action. He starts from the observation that we start from within ourselves and experience life in forward moving action. Although we are enacting the world constituted in language along with others, it personally compels us in forward moving action through such world of objects that do not seem to be co-constituted with others. To live within a linguistic-communal constitution of human life is to live-out the normativity of a community as if there is no other option.

Of course, Bakhtin (1984) is aware that we do think about ourselves from time to time and so he discusses the phenomenon self-representation. We do not apprehend much beyond our purview as we act and it does not work for us to think about ourselves from outside perspectives as if watching ourselves from a bird's eye view. We can only think of ourselves in the frame of reference from the language that we live and embody – how we ought to think about ourselves because it feels fragmented and piecemeal. It happens as the flow of life compels it. There is the moment where the flow of life is such that one ought to express oneself as an object and, strangely, the objectification seems incomplete. Self-representation is somewhat contrived because we never "coincide with ourselves" at such a moment according to Bakhtin (1990). This kind of orientation to self involves no efficacious agency from within a single participative consciousness. Participative consciousness is an act preforming movement that is limited to moving amongst objects and devoid of much axiological reflection or agency.

Bakhtin (1981) was concerned with destabilizing a single participative consciousness that is lived in totalizing action devoid of authentic critical self-reflexivity. Such monologic discourse is a target of Bakhtin because it prohibits an aesthetic mode of life: it inhibits self-authorship by telling just one story. The collision of speech genres in dialogue involves the juxtaposition of participative consciousnesses that is essential for agency. These kinds of moments are important for Bakhtin (1984) because they provide the moments where there is a sense of one lacking unity and continuity. As he writes, dialogue enables a lack of cogency and axiological unity in simply enacting life. Bakhtin (1984) thereby wrote about the need for another in order to be an agent. To see the value of oneself and one's actions, one needs a contextual awareness that exceeds a single participative consciousness. We need the other to see ourself as an object situated in a milieu, both ideologically and environmentally.

The apprehension of ourselves as another is a gift that comes through seeing ourselves through the purview of another participative consciousness and this gift. Bakhtin (1984) argues that dialogue with others allow us to apprehend the purview of the other that looks back on us. The surplus that the other sees is what allows us to engage in reflexive action that extends beyond our own restricted purview from within a single participative consciousness. Through others' eyes, we can see our own limitations and fragilities or the inconsistencies in our behavior that are obscured from within a participative consciousness. Another offers us reflexivity to speak to ourselves and apprehend the meaning of actions by offering other ostensive realities. We then juxtapose the image of ourselves and the image of the other to potentially come to a richer apprehension of our own experience that becomes experientially less seemingly essential. The surprising resistance is important because it

enriches our self examination as we struggle to figure the purpose and meaning once free from a single participative consciousness.

Bakhtin's (1984) point was that these kinds of dialogics are necessary for aesthetic *self-expression*. The other offers tensions and, most importantly, ground for contemplation about what kind of person one desires to be. This experience amounts to contemplation about our virtues and how we ought to express ourselves. We experience the potential for agentic contemplation among tensions about who we ought to be when a participative consciousness is ruptured (see Cresswell, 2011 for a full discussion). Self-expression is not about a true self finding representation, but it is about freedom from the unreflective enactment of a participative consciousness that allows for "aesthetic consummation" (Bakhtin, 1984). Aesthetic consummation is the momentary enactment of a stylistically unique self-expression where one acts by unifying what is brought to light in dialogue. It is in this way that we create a unique "soul" together with others that is non-reductive or essentialist as Bakhtin was not writing about the expression of a Romantic self-contained soul. It is about the expression of standards of excellence inherent in more than one participative consciousness at a time: *an aesthetic blending of different forms of life that amount to self-expression.*

Theoretical Psychology & Aesthetic Self-Expression

Bakhtin offers a vision for theoretical psychology as a practice of aesthetic self-expression. Consider the potential for a speech genre of theoretical psychology and the concomitant participative consciousness. Speech genres involve a particular jargon and I argue that it is reasonable to claim that scholars who work in theoretical psychology have their own lexicon about psychology. Consider the ways in which a theoretical psychologist, for example, can engage in conversation with a social psychologist steeped in statistical positivism where both speak past each other. Ideological orientations also demarcate speech genres and these include what jargon is used accompanied by a sense of what ought to be expressed. A speech genre involves an emotionally-evaluative tone that amounts to an embodied experience of the orientation taken by theoretical psychologists. Theoretical psychologists are quite diligent in their claims and challenges to the epistemic practices of statistical positivism and such challenges easily take on a moralist emotionally-evaluative tone. It's fair to say that there is a significant experiential valence entwined with our speech genre, which is not a problem *if we diligently attend to the dialogics of aesthetic self-expression.*

A participative consciousness that could amount to an unreflective professional practice that revolves around the normativity of doing theory, going to conferences with like-minded scholars, and writing explication of one's favorite theorists. The previous notes about the trend towards a somewhat insular nature of theoretical psychology warn of the possibility of an industry that can enable a flow of unreflective practice where there is a lack of efficacious self-reflection. That is, since there is a danger of disengaging from another, there is a possibility that theoretical psychology makes its own silo where reflexivity is contrived and lacking authenticity. It is not unreasonable to raise the possibility of monologic participative consciousness in theoretical psycholpgy.

I argue that theoretical psychology could take aesthetic self-expression as its model for what counts as excellence in practice. Juxtaposition by engaging another is crucial for theoretical psychologists to practice authentic axiological reflection about the kind of self that is constituted in our actions. Engagement with others is what provides a contextual purview and capacity for aesthetic action because theoretical psychologists can engage more than

one ostensive reality. The 'other' to theoretical psychologists can be different schools of thought and, in keeping with the vision of theoretical psychology articulated the opening of this paper, the 'other' can be and ought to be mainstream psychology. Theoretical psychologists can find agency in aesthetic consummation in a tension emerging from the struggle with what action expresses our virtues when confronted in authentic dialogue with another. Aesthetic self-expression as mode of doing theoretical psychology thereby fits with the virtues of the discipline: engaging others to offer critique and novel ways of doing the work of research in psychology.

Aesthetic Resistance to Anesthesia in Theoretical Psychology

Reading Bakhtin and Marcuse together charts an important direction for theoretical psychologists because aesthetic self-expression helps theoretical psychologists resist the general technological milieu in which the discipline is situated. The surplus of repression inherent in the performance principle means that life is taken for granted and alienated life is rarely questioned in its seeming given-ness. Bakhtin highlights the same experiential phenomenon and indicates how it can be understood as a sociocultural phenomenon: an oppressive participative consciousness. Entrenched via a general technological milieu of hyperreality, such a participative consciousness of theoretical psychology could support the surplus of repression and performance principle. That is, together Bakhtin and Marcuse help us see the danger of theoretical psychologists submitting to the pressures of production that press away from the critical self-reflexivity needed for phantasy. They offer a clear warning about the dangers of shallow non-reflexive production in theoretical psychology.

A striking similarity between Bakhtin and Marcuse is the role of aesthetics. Sensuality figures prominently in Marcuse as a rupturing force entwined with art. Bakhtin's (1984) ideas about experience are elaborated in his discussion of inversion of taken-for-granted realities that goes along with heteroglossia. Pleasure and play in art are entwined with liberation in the thinking of both theorists because they both point to the experience of rupture as essential to realize agentic action. Marcuse sees rupture from engagement with art and Bakhtin elaborates this idea to point out how aesthetic self-expression emerges from rupture in dialogue. The sensuousness in art that mediates reason in Marcuse is the dialogical juxtaposition inherent in heteroglossia that does the same in Bakhtin. Bakhtin shows how self-expression can be an aesthetic activity that enables resistance against the surplus of repression and performance principle. Recall that Bakhtin notes how a key component to aesthetic self-expression is the other that theoretical psychologists need to engage in order to practice an aesthetic mode that resists anesthesia. The sense of non-coincidence with oneself and one's favorite theories that potentially happens in dialogue is the second thought about the alienation experience that Marcuse notes as being inspired by art. Bakhtin's aesthetics of self-expression shows how this second thought can be prompted in dialogue and so a good theoretical psychologist should foster dialogue with those outside of the speech genre. *It is in this way that the practice of aesthetic self-expression resists anesthesia.*

Conclusion

Authors such as Bakhtin and Marcuse warn us of two dangers. One is the the danger of insular thinking that undercuts aesthetic self-expression in the work of theoretical psychology. The other danger is that our milieu of technological anesthesia can set us up to be vulnerable to insular thinking. The forgoing is a realization of Marcuse's (1974) concern

with the economic exploitation of persons that is also a risk in the practice of theoretical psychology. Bakhtin (1990; 1993) describes as the participative consciousness and an anesthetic state that prohibits us from asking what we really enjoy. Theoretical psychologists have the opportunity to enact an aesthetic in our work similar to the aesthetic self-expression. That is, our work could be a creative act that pushes back against the surplus of repression and performance principle inherent in our current general technological milieu and so avoid being lulled into an anesthetic state.

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