

## Editorial

*Renzo Carli\**

In the first part of this issue of RPC, the reader will find some articles dealing with the topic, proposed to Italian and foreign scholars, of the relevance of psychology and its contribution to living together. An important question, in our view.

It is a topic that underpins the meaning of psychology as a science and as a profession.

Many invitations were sent out and many were accepted. So far however the articles received are limited to a small group of generous colleagues interested in examining the question in greater depth. We hope to see more work delivered by July 2014, when the next issue of our journal comes out.

In actual fact, the contribution that psychology makes to living together is a vexed question.

On this point, I recall the conversation published by Robert Castel and Eugène Enriquez in 2008 in "Sociologies Pratiques". Castel the sociologist and Enriquez the psycho-sociologist discuss the recent spread of a generalized "psych" culture in which the whole of social life is regarded as a psychological event. The emergence of the individual and of a psychological interpretation focusing on the single person, confined exclusively and reductively to the psychological dimension, seem to the two authors to be typical of contemporary thought. The very expression "psychologization" of social relations points to its great flaw, underlining the danger that psychology may represent for a social system in which its contribution is reduced simply to pressure to conform and to de-collectivize the organization of work. The case against psychology put forward by the two authors is cogent and well-documented. In this analysis conducted by the two sociologists<sup>1</sup>, psychology is not seen as the science underpinning a profession that is important for individuals or for the social system where psychologists work. Instead, psychology is presented as a "foolish servant"<sup>2</sup> that bows to the power of every new master.

I think it is useful to go over the arguments that the article presents on the role of psychology, as opposed to the Marxist vision of society and to the psychoanalytical view. Marxism on the one hand and Durkheim's solidarity on the other, for the whole 19th and the first half of the 20th century, maintained the pre-eminence of society over the psychologized individual. In the final decades of last century and the early decades of the 21st century an exaggerated individualism took root in the analysis of the world of work, with the collapse of solidarity and the idea that each person must be considered responsible for what they do, for their success and failure, and for their development. This, says Enriquez, led to the need for a permanent evaluation of individuals, where people are individually forced to prove "in real time" that they have done their job well and reached the goals set for them, in a competitive dynamics no longer based on competence but on outcomes. Enriquez recalls that there has been a profound change in the methods of assessment offered by psychology: once there was assessment based on personality, and that was the age of paternalistic, charismatic organizations; then there came assessment designed to record the individual's conformity to

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\* Past Full Professor of Clinical Psychology at the Faculty of Psicologia 1 of the University "Sapienza" in Roma, member of Italian Psychoanalytic Society and International Psychoanalytical Association. Director of Rivista di Psicologia Clinica (Journal of Clinical Psychology and of the Specializing School in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy – Psychological clinical Intervention and Analysis of Demand.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Castel is head of research at *Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales*. Eugène Enriquez has taught sociology at Paris VII and, in 1959 with other colleagues, set up the *Association pour la recherche et l'intervention psychosociologiques* (ARIP). I know Castel only by his reputation, but I have known Eugène Enriquez for many years and consider him my teacher in the area of psycho-sociology; for me he is a colleague and friend with whom I have often worked despite sometimes not sharing his ideas. Enriquez is more a psycho-sociologist than a sociologist: he is trained in both sociology and psychoanalysis like many ARIP colleagues of the past, and has a deep knowledge of clinical psychology and social psychology. His vision of psychology, as it is presented in this article written with his colleague about the "psychologization" of social relations, seems to me a valuable critique.

<sup>2</sup>The foolish lazy servant par excellence is Harlequin. To quote from "Venipidia" the encyclopedia of Venice, written by Venetians and by those who love Venice: "[Harlequin] is loved by the public for his unquestionable likeableness and for being credulous and trusting with his fellows; it's no surprise that he is often the victim of trickery. Constantly hungry and always trying to improve his situation, his behavior is clumsy while his movements are agile, quick and acrobatic. Often defrauded and tricked due to his lack of intellect and his awkwardness, he lives from hand to mouth in the perennial search for food, he does humble jobs and is a sycophant and swindler by nature. Singular and complex in gestures, he moves with agility, nearly always leaping on tiptoe as if dancing, and speaking the Bergamo dialect of times gone by." ([www.venipidia.it](http://www.venipidia.it))

expected behaviors, typical of bureaucratic organizations. Today what is assessed is the results, and at the same time the individual's personality. This is the great perversion inherent to psychologization: individuals are assessed on the results obtained in their work, but at the same time their personalities are assessed. Individuals are continually challenged and each of them is subjected to permanent pressure. This happens in manufacturing firms but more generally in all forms of organization, from schools to universities, from services to volunteer associations, in sport as well as in religious organizations. Hence the notion of stress and the need to provide techniques to make it easier for people to tolerate stressful situations.

The analysis of the political, organizational and social aspects of work have been replaced by a psychologizing approach based on the evaluation of the responsibility individuals have to assume as regards their performance, growth or failure.

A critique is made of psychology in its "biologizing" aspect, where the individual's every behavioral or emotional manifestation seems to be predetermined; on the other hand, the debasement of psychology inherent to its adaptive side is stressed. This is the victory of the kind of psychology that is considered highly problematic and which believes it can measure everything. As Edward Lee Thorndike said at the beginning of the 1900s, all that exists, exists in a certain amount and can be measured. This statement lays the groundwork for a theory of measurement in psychology, open to interesting advances both in terms of research and of professional practice.

However, underlines Enriquez, when one "measures", one does so in relation to a specific prescriptive vision of what people should be and of the direction their evolution is expected to take. In this sense, the measurement conducted by psychologism is closely related to moralism, with social control, and the growth of conformism suited to a-critical productivity.

Where does this psychologization of work relations come from, and more generally, the psychologization of the whole network of social relations? According to our authors, this degeneration of the interpretation of relations originates specifically in the United States. It derives from an American debasement of the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. Castel, in particular, recalls his experience in the US in the mid-seventies, and his involvement with a wide range of group activities, from encounter groups to Gestalt groups, from primal scream practices to group training. Castel talks about these forms of intervention as low-cost "therapy for the normal"; his harsh term for those who practise them is "bastards of psychoanalysis". The direction taken in America has found concrete expression since the 1950s in the practice of training groups, or T-Groups: seminar situations where according to Enriquez (one of the founders of ARIP, the first association to import group activities to France), the aim for many years was to facilitate the single individual's "good functioning" inside the group, but also to make the group itself work better. The latter was seen as a workshop of social relations to bring about the acquisition of behaviors and relational styles to export to broader social organizations, work contexts, and relations between friends.

In short, the two authors juxtapose Marx, and therefore the possibility of dealing with the problems of the social system through political, organizational and social actions, to the American version of Freud, in a conception of psychoanalysis as a practice that "fixes the things that don't work", in the attempt to make individuals adapt as far as possible to the social system, accepted as being impossible to change. With Marx there is the desire to change the social system, to change the conditions of work or the organization of work; with Freud in the American version (the prototype of which is Carl Rogers), psychoanalysis is applied to people who are not ill: there is the attempt to change individuals so that they are able to accept the social system as it is, so that they are able to "produce" as well as they can, within the status quo of their context. To simplify, revolution as opposed to adaptation. This vision, if seen in the era of its publication, seems dated and deeply "partisan". It is however a vision that is interesting in its unrelenting criticism of psychology; a form of psychology that in its professional component deriving from the American experience seems to be a useful, obtuse tool of a system that by means of psychological intervention seeks to control individuals who are trained to produce ever more and better in a system accepted a-critically and considered only from an individualistic point of view.

The practices of contemporary psychology, according to this conversation, are those that focus on individual development or on coaching.

There is a passage, in Enriquez's statements, that acknowledges a different component of psychology: there are psychologists whose aim is to help people to adapt to the context, accepting it without questioning their work conditions or the power connotations of social relations. There are also psychologists that buck the trend, that work with the aim of facilitating individuals to become conscious of the situations they are in, facilitating thought about the situations they are experiencing, to think about their modes of acting so as to be able to resist often unbearable pressure in work organizations and in the broader social context.

It is interesting to notice that Castel in particular, but also Enriquez, talk about European psychoanalysis as a practice that has proven useful only if confined to mental pathology, therefore as a tool of psychiatric intervention. On the other hand, American psychoanalysis, according to the authors, has been converted to psychologizing individuals for adaptation, saving them from the contradictions of their social experience, and therefore breaking down any motivation to struggle, oppose or unite in protest. If unity is strength, disunity or, in Castel's term, de-collectivization, entails the loss of tension in the hypothesis that the solution of the whole social problem lies in acquiring good relations, namely, learning to conform.

One can agree with many of the statements made by the authors. But what kind of psychology are they talking about? Is it possible to see psychology's whole contribution as this action designed to make individuals adapt, to break down all social conflict, all awareness of the problems that the organization of work on the one hand and the broader social context on the other pose to community consciousness?

The arguments of Castel and Enriquez seem to ignore the contribution made by psychoanalysis to the process of social construction permitted by collusive emotional life, in the different local cultures. Their accusation of psychologization of the context belongs to a specific local culture, that of the Seventies in France, torn between political militancy and the experience of intervening in organizations. On this issue, at the end of the Eighties, there was a severe conflict within ARIP, leading to the disintegration of the group of founders who had guided the association for over thirty years.

Thinking of Italy brings to mind the fact that psychology has not even been able to present itself in the adaptive sense so harshly attacked by the French sociologists. It comes to mind that, in its long history, Italian psychology has been committed to "producing" huge numbers of psychologists, rather than developing some sense of the presence of the psychologist and therefore of psychological work, in the social system of our country.

Thinking of psychology, "The parable of the blind leading the blind"<sup>3</sup> comes to mind: a canvas painted by Pieter Brueghel the elder in 1568, today found in the Capodimonte museum in Naples shows a group of poor wretches walking with no real guide, leaning on each other, all destined to fall into the ditch where the leader is already lying. A pitiful scene, also because the group is not going to fall to their death in a chasm; they will simply end up head over heels in a ditch.



We hope to offer a stimulus to rethink the role of psychology and its contribution to living together. The present state of psychology, however, sees countless psychologists busy calculating indexation, enthusing over the "impact factor" achieved with their publications, engaged in networking for teaching posts or public exams, indifferent to the demand that the context makes to psychology. It is a form of psychology turned inward, lacking the ability to give a credible, serious response to the problems of living together.

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<sup>3</sup> Matteo 15:14: "And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

The goal of the *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica* is to draw the attention of psychologists in the scientific and professional area to these issues, in the hope that they will critically retrace the paths that led psychologists away from their mission and this will arouse critical thinking about the topics and issues that psychology is capable of dealing with.

Below is the invitation extended to Italian and foreign scholars on the theme of this issue of the *Rivista*:

### **An invitation**

On the first Sunday of May 1747, Johann Sebastian Bach travelled to the court of Frederick II, King of Prussia, at the invitation of the monarch.

Frederick II, a music lover, composer and flautist, suggested to the old Cantor a short musical theme, which the King played on the flute, and then on the harpsichord. The King invited the old maestro to improvise on that theme. Bach, reluctant at first, repeated the musical theme on the keyboard several times. Then he began his improvisation with a three-voice fugue, performing all the different types of canon, each time a different variation on the theme. Thus, the Musical Offering was born, perhaps Johann Sebastian Bach's greatest work, given its modernity and magnificent counterpoint.

Just like Frederick II, the RPC (*Rivista di Psicologia Clinica*) proposes a short topic/theme inviting recipients of this "theme" to improvise their Offering based on their theoretical thinking and experience. We hope the scholars we contact will accept this challenge and will be intrigued enough to offer their own variations of the following.

What has been the contribution of psychology to *culture* and *human coexistence* in your country and more broadly in the World?

Some stated that one of the contributions of psychology consists of having changed the way parents, and the wider adult population, perceive and relate to children. **What are the changes in culture, attitude, behavior or relationships within the social system, that were motivated by psychology?**

Do you believe that psychology's greatest contribution to human and cultural coexistence derives from scientific studies disseminated to the general population, or from the practice of psychological interventions, addressed to the individual, groups and social organisations?

The *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica* aims at promoting a debate on this issue which, in wider terms, concerns **the contribution of psychology to the functioning of coexistence within systems** of human and social diversity.

We ask for your valuable contribution.

A select number of contributions will be published in a Special Issue (Volume 2/2013) of *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica*, which will be published on-line in December 2013.

### *Bibliography*

Castel, R., & Enriquez, E. (2008). D'où vient la psychologisation des rapports sociaux? *Sociologies Pratiques*, 2, 17, 15-27.