

**Psychological Awareness of Social Issues and
The Imperative for Psychology to be Social Aware**
APA Symposium, Denver, 2016

On Becoming and Un-Becoming a Psychologist:

What is Psychological about our Technology?
What is Technological about our Psychology?

Introduction:

I acknowledge that the title of my talk might seem quite strange at an APA Convention. So let me begin with three questions implicit in my title?

1-in the world of technology is there anything psychological about psychology?

2-might psychology defined as a STEM discipline be aiding and abetting the increasing sense of de-humanization and alienation that characterize the technological world?

3-is continuing to be a psychologist within this framework un-becoming for the health and psychological life of such a psychologist?

My remarks today are a few reflections on how I have been thinking about these issues

Hiroshima, Denver, Nagasaki and Beyond

Aug 6, 1945, 8:15 am Hiroshima, Japan

The first atomic bomb ever used in warfare takes approximately 44 seconds to fall toward the city and explode. In those 44 seconds approximately 80,000 thousand people, about 30% of the population of Hiroshima, live out the last moment of their lives before they are incinerated. The bomb is called 'Little Boy.'

Please note that I am using the present tense to indicate that that first bomb is still exploding, that those 44 seconds are still happening, that we are all still today citizens of Hiroshima living within that mushroom cloud.

Aug 6, 2016, XXX am Denver, Colorado, APA Convention.

On Aug 6, 1945 did we cross a threshold in which the very quality of being a human being has been radically destroyed?

What would 30% of Denver's population be?

Is psychology still possible after Hiroshima?

Is there anything that lies in the rubble that might be recovered, some slivers or shards of psychological life that remain?

What might a psychology of shards and slivers be and what might be the work of such a psychologist?

Lest we forget:

Three days after Hiroshima the second atomic bomb called 'Fat Man' explodes over Nagasaki.

What's in a name—Little Boy and Fat Man?

Lest we forget:

Six million Jews among countless others exterminated in the Holocaust.

Is thinking even possible after the Holocaust?

And lest we forget that despite the countless resolutions and declarations that such events cannot happen again, they continue to happen and are happening:

Cambodia, 1975-79: Approximately 3,000,000 Cambodians, between 21 and 33 % of the population, exterminated,

Rwanda, 1994: between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Tutsis, approximately 70% of them, exterminated.

Darfur, 2003: 300,000 Darfuri civilians exterminated.

The numbers so stagger the imagination that a new word is coined to describe these horrors: Genocide, the term coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 and adopted in 1948 by the newly formed United Nations in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, a treaty that is intended to prevent any future genocides.

Lest we forget!

If we do not know where we have come from, we do not understand where we are now or where we are going.

And if we, as we very well might be, are outraged by these events or benumbed with fear and anxiety and maybe even despair, then must we begin to imagine a different kind of question than the question we usually ask.

Not, what is to be done?

but,

Who are we?

Before action, the work of reflection so that in the mirror of these events we might catch a glimpse of our own faces and in not denying the face that is displayed there

might explore the conditions that have made these events possible,

might face the sorrow over what we have done and continue to do,

might endure the grief of who we have become,

and out of that grief

might recover what we have lost and left behind of ourselves, those qualities that make us most human, those moral, ethical and aesthetic qualities of the human spirit that are beyond the measures of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Notes toward a Marginal Psychology

Thinking is a communal act. We think in the context of others, with companions, a lovely word whose root means with bread. Thinking alongside companions both living and dead we feed and nourish each other. The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty has been one of my companions and alongside me now he reminds me that 'we see because we speak and we speak because we see.'

We live in a world through the lens of language. For human beings nature is being continuously reimagined via the narratives we weave. Poets, painters, artists of all stripes are web weavers, spinners of tales. So too are priests, prophets and psychologists. And so too are scientists.

We are spiders in the world-wide-web and at our computers each of us has a **terminal identity**. I trust you hear the other meaning of this term. The terminal identity of the self in the technological virtual worlds of our digital devices might be lethal perhaps even fatal to our embodied human condition. And yet, while the technological world might be life threatening not only to us, but also to the oceans and the atmosphere, to the trees and the animals, to all of nature, the condition need not be incurable. If the spider would be the last one to discover the web,

because of what we are we can say that we are spiders because we are not spiders. We might be continuing to weave the web of technologically created virtual worlds, like, for example, the recent world-wide phenomenon of Pokemon Go, but unlike the spider a new possibility happens when the web is broken. Our ecological crises and the God Wars are two such moments of breakdown. So too are the political and ecological crises across the globe. And so are the millions of displaced refugees of these ecological, religious, political and economic crises. They are specific exemplars of the deep root of homelessness in the technologically webbed world.

Hermeneutics as a Cultural-Historical Therapy

One of the things that could happen in a moment of breakdown is a breakthrough into pausing long enough to re-gard, to take another look at, the scientific-technological narrative that defines who and how we are. This kind of work, however, is difficult because it is not primarily a critique of the reigning narrative or a call to action. It is not a political, economic, or social form of activism. Rather it is a work of anamnesis.

As such, it is the slow work of re-turning to those cultural-historical conditions that have made the current narrative possible and even appear as necessary and perhaps even inevitable. Hermeneutics as anamnesis, as the work of not just remembering but of un-forgetting, is a cultural-historical therapeutics, which meets head on the resistances to changing the familiar entrenched narratives by the slow and patient work of re-imagining those origins for the sake of an other beginning, for turning away from the current narrative as the measure for what is real and true and right so that one might re-imagine the reigning narrative not as a fate but as a possibility for another beginning.

Monsters and Margins

Psychology practiced as a cultural-historical anamnesis is a

marginal discipline. It must be because what is to be un-forgotten lingers on the margins of the collective mind. Margins are the place where what has been forgotten, denied, excluded etc from the narrative become our 'monsters'. Psychology as a work of return is a monstrous undertaking.

To do such work one has to be in the right mood and psychology as it exists today, as an APA discipline that would define itself as a STEM science suffers from a mood disorder for which there is not nor can there be a pharmaceutical remedy. Rather what is required is a radical shift in psychology's discourse.

Given the time limit I can only list some of the characteristics of this shift:

1-Recovering the subjunctive mood for psychological thinking and writing, the mood of the verb that is contrary to fact and that expresses possibility, of what might be, a mood all but lost in English but which is quite healthy in French. If psychology were to cultivate this mood, then psychology's addiction to nouns, which is its monumental problem, and to the indicative mood could shift.

2-Emphasizing the present tense in its thinking and writing to underscore that time as we live it is not a line—as William Faulkner once noted, 'the past ain't dead; hell, it's not even past yet.') Time as it is lived is a spiral in which every present moment is a possibility of imagining a future by re-memorizing a past, and/or re-memorizing a past for the possibility of imagining a future.

3-Cultivating the passive voice as a capacity to be receptive and responsive to what addresses us. In this regard a psychological education would include the development of a poetic sensibility as a complement to the dominant empiricism of STEM

4-Letting go of psychology as an independent discipline and embracing it as an ancillary style of knowing and being that

qualifies all other disciplines, a shift from psychology as a noun to psychological as an adjective, a shift from departments of psychology to curricula of psychological studies in departments of economics, history etc

5-Nurturing a metaphoric sensibility that would de-literalize our relation to the bodies of knowledge we create.

In these moves and others, unbecoming a STEM psychologist one might develop a psychological style that cultivates the possibility of possibility as its work, a work, which always on the margins, dissolves narratives that have become ideologies.

In so doing, one might also recover the sense of grief for what we have lost, left behind, abandoned, disregarded and marginalized and doing so learn the educative value of the grieving process in a culture that prizes distractions.

Learning to be receptive and responsive, one might also develop a respect for the value of silence, so easily drowned out by the noise pollution of a technological culture, and a respect for solitude in a wired world of 24/7.

In addition, one might begin to recover the lost arts of aesthetic appreciation for the vitality and beauty of the natural world so displaced as it is by our virtual worlds.

Finally, these shifts might help us re-imagine a psychological style of life that is an e-ducation into becoming an ethical human being who takes responsibility for his/her actions.

A Closing Reflection:

I would rather not do this kind of work, which I have been doing now for 44 years. At least not any more! But I do it

because

the globalization of the scientific-technological world picture is also a colonization of the collective psyche, which has perhaps its most disturbing expression in the work of Ray Kurzweil who rather cheerfully predicts that the marriage between computer power and genetics is leading toward the transcendence of our biology. We are, he says, heading toward a singularity when all human knowledge will be downloaded into the cloud and when we will seed the universe with the bits and data of who we once were. STEM psychology is a nurturing soil for this 'Angelic' vision for a new paradise engineered by the human mind,

because

I have a grandson whose smile looks so full of hope, and I have people I love, and I am drawn every day back into the world and nature with a sense of gratitude,

and because,

like all things psychological, this work is less a choice and more a vocation.

