

PIERRE DELION
ON PSYCHOPOLITICS
“What Is Institutional Psychotherapy?”
&
“The Republic of False Selves”

Pierre Delion

Translated by Matthew H. Bowker



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About the author

Pierre Delion is professor emeritus of child psychiatry at the University of Lille, former chief of the Lille University Hospital Center Child Psychiatry Department, and a psychoanalyst. He has worked extensively with autism, psychosis, and all archaic pathologies, and with babies. He has led several teams of “sectoral psychiatry,” including one in a university hospital, and has focused on combining sectoral psychiatry with institutional psychotherapy in an attempt to encourage humane psychiatric practices. He has written numerous psychiatric works about babies, autism, psychosis, and institutional psychotherapy, and has created an institute of psychoanalytic psychotherapy for children and adolescents in Lille. He continues to promote humane psychiatry by participating in experience exchange meetings with numerous teams in the health and medico-social sectors, and by giving lectures on psychiatry.

He insists on the need not to oppose the neurosciences to trans-ferential psychopathology, but, on the contrary, to use these contributions so as to take into account all the anthropological factors involved in psychic suffering.

About the translator

Matthew H. Bowker, Ph.D., was educated at Columbia University, Institut d'études politiques de Paris, and the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the author of over fifteen books and several dozen journal articles and chapters on psychopolitical theory. He is currently Clinical Assistant Professor in the Social Sciences Interdisciplinary Program at The State University of New York (SUNY).

Translator's introduction

Matthew H. Bowker

Pierre Delion is professor emeritus in child psychiatry in the faculty of medicine at Lille, a child psychiatrist, and a psychoanalyst. His work is as straightforward as it is affecting. Sadly, he is not read enough in the English-speaking world, not because his teaching, writings, and political activities are altogether unknown to us, but rather because his works have not yet been translated into English. The present book attempts to address this unfortunate deficit in our knowledge.

Delion's words have been easy to translate into English with only the rarest exceptions, to be discussed below. Apart from the translation of his books' terminology, it has been important to me as a translator to remain as faithful as possible to the original meaning of Delion's words while, at the same time, attempting to convey something of his style, which combines a careful thoughtfulness with the power and urgency that can only come from

a scholar-practitioner with vast experience and understanding. Of course, as any humble translator will tell you, if one wants the unadulterated Pierre Delion, one must read him in the original French.

A term used in *The Republic of False Selves* may cause readers some confusion. That term is “*socius*,” which, in the Latin, refers to a singular associate or confidant, as in: “Mr. Jones was a long-time assistant and *socius* of the President.” Those familiar with the work of Gilles Deleuze may recognize the term *socius* in his specific usage, referring to that to which production is attributed, for example, the body of the despot in empire; capital under capitalism. For Delion, however, the term takes on broader meaning to include the entire social, cultural, organizational, and familial environment of an individual or group of individuals, such that it comes to refer to the environmental context of a patient as well as what we might think of as the collective social psyche of a population.

At the same time, while American scholars, in particular, have been a bit obsessed by Hannah Arendt’s famous distinction between *social* and *political* realms of action, Delion finds no such clear division. In fact, his work challenges this construction at its root, arguing that it is precisely the *liens sociétaux* (which I have translated as “*social bonds*”) through which we attend to each other as subjects that make true democracy possible. Here, of course, we are talking not about democracy as the simple act of voting (although Delion’s wise discussion of media-effects on voting should not be discounted here) but of a broader conception of democracy as a state of politics in which each individual may come to realize maturity in a society that respects, rather than alienates, his humanity.

In Delion’s own words, democracy refers to a “society based on freedom and equality ... or more generally still, to a set of values: political, social, or cultural ideals and principles.”

These democratic values and principles are the same as those needed in social organizations and institutions of care for the mentally ill. Indeed, he notes in *The Republic of False Selves*: “What holds for person-to-person psychiatry also holds true for democracy.” This book, in particular, moves quickly and is quite rich, as it begins with politics, turns deftly to media criticism, examines deleterious social and political developments on the field of psychiatry, and finally returns to a discussion of politics.

Readers should note well that the two texts presented here were not originally intended to be paired together, so the reader may find that he or she must do a bit of work in moving from one to the other. In my view, the works operate quite well as a duo, connecting the micro- to the macro- of psychopolitics, from the individual symptom to the world’s democratic movements. In deciding which text to present first, the author and I have opted to begin with *What Is Institutional Psychotherapy?* “Institutional psychotherapy” is referred to at times within the text as “I.P.” This term (and this abbreviation) may well be unfamiliar to American or UK readers, just as its concomitant, “sector psychiatry,” refers to a manner, operant since the 1960s in France, of organizing mental health care around specific geographic areas with the goal of providing care to patients within their immediate *socius* and by professionals familiar with and even operating in the same *socius*. Delion’s argument in *What Is Institutional Psychotherapy?* is (at the very least) twofold:

- (1) The “institution” must be regarded as the entirety of human, psychic, and social work that informs the care of the patient and therefore contributes to his or her “transferential constellation,” and
- (2) The institution and all of its constituents (i.e., persons and professionals performing any function) must be held, cared for, and listened to as much as the administrators of the institution, if it is to be maximally humane and effective.

We believe this book affords the reader an introduction to Delion's thought within the field of psychotherapy before asking readers to explore the broader political connections between the clinical institution and the society as a whole in *The Republic of False Selves*.

WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY?

A Conversation with Yasuo Miwaki

Pierre Delion

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Note on the present work

Dr. Yasuo Miwaki recently asked me to come to Japan to hold a conference on *Institutional Psychotherapy*, which he had discovered during an internship at the clinic in La Borde in 1998. Since then, he remained in contact with Jean Oury, and was deeply affected by the latter's death in May 2014.

On the occasion of the publication of *Mon combat pour une psychiatrie humaine*,¹ he hoped that I could answer a few questions that arose while reading this book. These questions formed the backbone of the conference that was delivered in Tokyo on November 11, 2017, and which he translated into Japanese.

¹P. Delion (with P. Coupechoux), *Mon combat pour une psychiatrie humaine*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2016.

I cannot thank him enough for his role in disseminating the concepts of institutional psychotherapy in his country, as well as in the Scientific Society of Transcultural Psychiatry to which he belongs.

Pierre Delion, 2017

THE REPUBLIC OF FALSE SELVES

Pierre Delion

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Preface

For several decades, we have lived in a world whose meaning escapes us more and more. This in spite of the democratic project which, at least in its beginning, prioritized meaningful social bonds as fundamental to its sustainment and cultivation.

It is precisely this state of (post-)democracy, threatened by neglect, that I propose to call “the republic of false selves” in order to describe the now dominant tendency to consider the impression the subject gives of himself (self/ego/me) as more important than his authentic self.

This phenomenon has considerable deleterious effects, which must be understood if we are to transform them into creative possibilities, thereby “restoring the subject within the individual.”¹¹

¹¹ See Jean Oury, *Le Collectif, Seminar 1985–1986*, Paris: Scarabée, 1986, re-ed. Nîmes: Champ Social, 2005.

It goes to the very heart of the work of all *psychistes*: pedagogues, educators, caregivers, judges, and all other professionals engaged with human relations.

And via the (ever more numerous) warnings of professionals of care, education, and justice at the front lines of attack on the subject-citizen, we see that democracy is now more radically a question of keeping alive the possibility of mutually constituting ourselves as free beings, even if only impermanently.

This book modestly attempts to examine the details of this complex situation, in order to return meaning to today's (political, medical, educational) practices, deprived of their own analytical tools in favor of techno-bureaucratic protocols and innovations, increasingly globalizing but also dehumanizing our societal bonds (*liens sociétaux*) at an alarming speed.

It is addressed to professionals who wish to resist this disintegrative tendency, even as it grows each day in strength, which is to say: to take up an ethical and courageous position and no longer to accept a kind of normative vagrancy justified solely by managerial logic.

Perhaps it will be of help, as a consequence, to those concerned with work in human relationships: to patients, to children, to dependent persons, to struggling citizens for whom we have become, in our defending body, the advocates for their defense in humanity.

No matter the cost, we must no longer remain silent in the face of this attack on all that binds together our singularities; we must leave behind consternation, and we must do so together to give life once again to the concept of a "collective," today drowned in the sands of an extreme individualism. We must also, each of us, reflect on the political arrangements that govern our ordinary life, whatever one may think of it—and especially when we ignore it.