The Palo Alto Group: the context and the context of the group that discussed it – political, social and personal questions

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It is generally agreed upon that the Palo Alto Group comprised one of the main sites of development of family therapy (along those of John Bell, Murray Bowen, Nathan Ackerman) and quite possibly the most influential for the years that followed. The instigating factor was the "Schizophrenia Research Project" which began in late 1952 and concluded in June 1961. The group's goal was to understand the role of behaviour in a system of human relationships. The magnitude of the group's influence is easily recognisable in many subsequent family therapy approaches, like the MRI Brief Therapy Model, Steve de Shazer's and Insoo Berg's solution-focused approach, the Milan group's approach, the narrative and post-modern approaches, as well as the in cultural anthropology, psychiatry, psychology and other humanistic sciences. The present paper discusses the fundamental principles that the group called attention to, shines the spotlight on certain parts of the context in which the group was born and develops a number of questions with a political dimension.

The group
The initial research group was founded by Gregory Bateson and included John H. Weakland, a chemical engineer that later turned towards social anthropology, and Jay Haley, who among other things, was interested in the social and psychological analysis of imagination.

Gregory Bateson constitutes, perhaps, the group's central figure, which as an observation seems to not do justice to the rest of the group that was characterised by outstanding creativity. Bateson entered the

group as an anthropologist, a social scientist, a linguist, a semiotician and cyberneticist. His multifaceted work, extending back to the previous decade, included the expansion of systems' theory into social/behavioural sciences. The first person he invited into the group was **John Weakland** (Weakland, Fisch, Watzlawick, 2010) because of his contribution to communication theory and his pioneering work in cultural anthropology. Jay Haley, on his part, brought the theory of control and power as driving forces within the family and was called to observe and study the work of clinicians such as Milton Erickson, Joseph Wolpe and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann.

Earlier, in 1951, Dr. Don Jackson – a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst - moves to Palo Alto and meets Gregory Bateson, while working in his own private practice and serving as a director of the Veterans' psychiatric hospital. Jackson joined the group in early 1954. The Viennese **Paul Watzlawick** – a doctor of philosophy, trained psychoanalyst, scholar strictly oriented towards modernism, and the mechanic metaphor of the black box for the human mind and logic – joined the group in 1960. His presence marked the second phase of the group's life. Finally, **William F. Fry MD**, also a psychiatrist with an interest in studying humour, participated in several periods.

In October 1958, Don Jackson founds the Mental Research Institute (MRI) as a centre for the construction of the theoretical and practical foundations that were set by Bateson's group that was approaching the conclusion of its common endeavour and invites Virginia Satir to join it (Ray, 2017). A synopsis of this work is available in the work of Watzlawick, Beavin-Bavelas and Jackson (1967), entitled "Pragmatics of Human Communication". A lengthy review of the work and theories of the Bateson group can also be found in Haley's chapter in Sluzki and Ransom's book "Double Bind: The Foundation of the Communication Approach to the Family" (1976), which includes comments by Bateson and Weakland.

Focus – Transitions

According to Rasheed et al. (2011) the concept of the human self as incorporated in social relationships or as a relational self comprised the directive paradigm for early family therapy. For the first family therapists, the source of human emotional pain was a symptom of disturbed family relationships and/or disturbed standards of family communication (Rasheed et al., 2011). In short, one could say that the main conceptual theoretical transition on which the work of the Palo Alto Group was based, boils down to the transition from the concept of the "autonomous self" to that of the "relational self".

The initial research focused on the general nature of communication, especially on the existence of different levels of messages and paradoxes, beginning with Whitehead and Russell's Theory of Logical Types that focused on the multiplicity of communication messages, the investigation of "schizophrenic" communication, research on learning this specific communication and implementation of a methodology of cultural anthropology (Weakland, 1951,1967) for the analysis of family interaction. At the same time, there is a shift of the focus, from learning that originates from previous experiences to the nature of the interaction, and the present moment from which the common "reality" emerges (Ray, 2917).

More specifically, Watzlawick, Beavin-Bavelas and Jackson (1967) and Ray (2017) discuss the necessity to introduce certain conceptual shifts in order to approach human behaviour, and especially in order to comprehend psychopathology.

The interactive view of communication that was introduced by the Palo Alto Group also includes the importance of punctuation that is imposed by the observer, where the attribution of meaning is often different, and the evaluation of how people interpret their own messages, verbal and non-verbal (Ray, 2017). The level of the relationship lies beyond the awareness of the participants in the communication (Jackson, 1965a; Watzlawick et al., 1967).

Following these, the need to make a distinction of the level of communication emerged. According to Jackson (1965a) every piece of communication transfers information of a pragmatic nature, which can possibly be evaluated regarding whether they are true or not and can reasonably be treated as the "object" of communication. This level of communication was defined as the content level of communication, like for instance in the mention of the phrase "the streets are frozen" or in a nod of the head. It refers to the aspect of the command that can be translated as "this is how I define the relationship in which this reference takes place, which means that this is how you must see me in relation to you".

When the lens of research focuses on the family, then according to Jackson"family is a system governed by rules, as its members interact with each other in an organised, repetitive manner, and this shaping of behaviours can be defined as the dominant principle of family life" (1965a). In relationships, people behave as if they are following rules. Once these repeated exchanges are understood, they become the focus of attempts to produce change (Jackson, 1965b).

Jackson formulate all the above with the phrase "the individual does the best he can at any given moment" (1952) and descriptions such as "lazy", "stubborn" etc. should be avoided. In formulations such as this, one can observe the first signs of a new epistemology that in the years that followed would be more obvious, and where "reality" is constructed as it emerges from interaction patterns. This contributes to a deliberate change of the verb "I am" to "I appear to be".

Despite still being in the first order cybernetics, the concept of the observer is starting to become perceivable as a participating factor, albeit still external in relation to the system. Haley and Weakland (in Rasheed et al., 2011) reminded in a supervision setting, Don Jackson's question of "what did you do to achieve that?" which implies that the therapist plays an active part in the situation. "Every time it was necessary to learn that the observer urges the observed. In mental health, we must not only calculate the physical effect of the observers' predisposition but also deal with a second variable: the patient's predisposition".

Concluding this brief presentation of the epistemological principles developed by the Palo Alto Group, certain elements that Watzlawick presented in the International Delphic Symposium organised by the AIA in 1985 will be referred to. Like Jackson (1961) before him, Watzlawick points out that in order to produce change, insight is recognized as insignificant, reframing replaces interpretation, the difference between prescriptive and descriptive language is expressed, the importance of behavioural exercises is highlighted and the essential role of the positive disposition is promoted, as is a significant shift from the intrapsychic consideration to the methodology of cultural anthropology (Weakland, 1951) and Harry Stack Sullivan's ''Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry'' (1953).

Shift from what is inside the "box"/how the "box'' work to how it relates/how it functions inside the wider context.	The widespread, at the time, perception of the mind as a black box is retained (this is essentially borrowed from the field of telecommunications) with a change of focus from the structure of the mind (box) to its relationships and interactions, and to the vital importance of the context, at the given moment, for comprehending and assigning meaning to behaviour.
Shift of the central role of consciousness and non-consciousness to meaning.	Meaning is essential for the subjective experience of communication with others and is not subject to an objective judgment. In other words, this is a shift from the nature of the individual to the nature of the relationships between people that interact at the present moment.
Shift from the past to the present	Instead of seeking causes in the past, which is a rather unreliable process, we can focus on the present of the communication, in the sense of seeking the patterns that exist in the here and now.
Shift from the cause ("why?") to the effect ("what is the result?").	Any hypothetical causes acquire a secondary significance, and the result of the behaviour in the interaction acquires primary significance. Instead of seeing, for example, the probable cause of a symptom, what emerges is the importance of the role that it plays. The role of what its "effect" is inside the interaction.
Shift from the linear view of patterns of communication to the circular view.	This follows the Hippocratic quote that states that all parts of the organism form a cycle. Thus, every part is both a beginning and an end.
Shift to a focus on the relativity of "normal" and "not normal".	Shift from a distinction to a viewpoint where a behaviour can be studied only in the general context in which it is manifested. Thus, the idea of "normality" is rendered disputable.

Table 1: Basic epistemological shifts of the Palo Alto Group

One thing leads to another

Palo Alto and the Institute afterwards, constituted a place of dynamic exchange of ideas, where people from very different backgrounds collaborated, clashed and shaped together a new epistemological viewpoint. Bateson, in a speech he delivered in memory of Jackson (Ray, 2007), who had died unexpectedly two years prior, in 1968, unfolds the culture and philosophy that developed in the MRI. The speech survived thanks to Weakland who kept and processed thousands of hours' worth of transcriptions of recorded material. Here Bateson utilises a multitude of examples, in an attempt to focus on his fundamental position that power is relative and relational, and its conceptual use as a metaphor from the field of physics, may be dangerous. For Bateson the world is "a world in which causation is organised into circuit structures… the world is on the whole self corrective" (Ray, 2007: 863). What happens in one part of the system, whether it be a bootlegger, a person with schizophrenia, or even a dolphin, affects this part, which in turn affects the whole, usually in ways that escape our perception. The issue of power, perhaps not unsurprisingly, seems to have been the main field of conflict between Bateson and Haley that had led to intense disputes.

In the same speech, Bateson points out that every linear response constitutes a threat to the ecology of the system. The examples he offers refer to multiple forms of control: fighting bootlegging, intervention in a family in order to control the symptoms of the identified patient with a diagnosis of schizophrenia,

the privileges and hierarchy in a village in Bali, control of parasites with the use of DDT, an alcoholic's belief that he can control his relationship with alcohol, or the belief that you can put a baby to sleep in five minutes and thus, "control" your time.

In 1995, in the last days of his life, Weakland participated in a series of interviews. In one (Ray & Schlanger, 2013) he says: "Explicitly or implicitly they give the impression that our theory is the final answer and that is not what it was all about. The point is more the concept, both in my clinical work as well as in my entire career at the MRI, that one thing leads to another. You will never have the final answer unless to hold on to one thing and never let it go so that you are not able to see anything else… The educational, political, and religious systems are full of 'let's find the definitive answer and cling on to it. What we do is more throwing ideas around which we found useful to see further but they were not the final answers. But people want the final answer".

Wendel A. Ray (2007), former Director and Senior Research Fellow of the MRI offers his view unequivocally regarding the central dogma of the MRI Brief Therapy Model: "Difficulties are a part of life and typically are handled in ways that they resolve themselves. Difficulties can become problems, viscous cycles and games without end, when ineffective attempts to solve inadvertently serve to maintain and perpetuate them".

George Orwell (1946) said: "To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle". The fruits of such a constant struggle constitute the most fundamental contribution of the Palo Alto Group, and were continued individually by various members of the group later on. The Brief Therapy model continues to be one of the most influential models as it comprised the pragmatic and philosophical cornerstone of the subsequent developments in constructivism, namely social constructionism and the post-modern approaches.

The context of the people that discussed the context
Inevitably, a discussion regarding the context in which the research group was born and worked renders the focus on the social, political and cultural context of the era necessary. Obviously, this particular assessment may be incomplete and perhaps partial. Lyn Hoffman (2006), in her warm and thorough approach of the history of family therapy, describes its evolution as "a Jewish callah, or braided Easter bread, with early strands forming, then disappearing, then reappearing in a changed position or another side… it was the conversation between the strands that made the entire braid so special".

Undoubtedly, World War II was a definitive historical event that created a large team of scientists who were enlisted to apply their scientific research to wartime projects, many of whom continued doing so after the war during the period that would come to be known as the Cold War. In the 50s, when the Palo Alto Group is formed, there are at least three important theories that are born in the ashes of war: General Systems Theory, Cybernetics and Communications Theories. It is clear that, to a significant extent, they were formulated or evolved because of the war and were utilised for military purposes.

Even a brief mention of WWII and the role that "sciences" played in it, especially psychology with psychological operations and mathematics, would require research that would be translated into volumes. Moreover, financial factors, the role of the Rockefeller Foundation, the role of politics in the evolution of cybernetics, but also the effect of cybernetics on politics, the cold war etc. cannot be

discussed in detail here. We will attempt to focus on just a few points that may shed some light on certain aspects of the positions and shifts thereof that were presented above, beginning with the change in thinking, and also in thinking about the thinking that had taken place in previous centuries, as well as the main sociological paradigms of the era.

The general Systems theory, for instance, as proposed in the 40s (1949) and developed in the following decades (1969) by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, introduces concepts such as "system" in the sense of "a complex of organised and interacting elements that form a functioning whole". General Systems Theory offered numerous other definitions (family as a system) that were utilised directly in the study of families, like for instance boundaries, system and subsystem, homeostasis, role, relationship.

During the same period of WWII, in connection with the aforementioned, the term cybernetics is coined by the mathematician Norbert Wiener, who had been enlisted into researching and designing anti-aircraft weapons. In his book "The Human Use of Human Beings. Cybernetics and Society" that was published in 1950 creating quite a sensation, Wiener attempted to highlight the importance of "feedback" as a parameter of learning.

"Another example of the learning process appears in connection with the problem of the design of prediction machines. At the beginning of the last World War, the comparative inefficiency of anti-aircraft fire made it necessary to introduce apparatus which would follow the position of an airplane, compute its distance, determine its length of time before a shell could reach it, and figure out where it would be at the end of that time".

At a time of war, a series of intellectual and technical developments were implemented that were in the heart of the concepts of "feedback" and of "constant inter-contact of human/mechanic" (Sarajevo, 2018). During the 50s and the 60s, cybernetics were almost entirely focused, onthe one hand in the development of automated control systems for technological uses, and on the other hand on the study of the applications of feedback in various scientific fields (ranging from mathematics to sociology). Generally speaking the goal was control, and terms like feedback stemmed from that.

Rasheed et al. (2011) on their part, in an attempt to present the main conceptual and theoretical influences, focus among other things on sociological theories of the time, the political and social context and the epistemology that was utilised. From a sociological perspective, one could say that the Palo Alto Group is formed under the influence of two sociological movements, **symbolic interactionism** and **structural/functional theories**.

Symbolic interactionism is founded in pragmatic philosophy of the early 20th century and its main representatives are George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1969). It views humans as beings that create meaning that are incorporated in social interactions. These interactions are shaped by the meaning that humans assign to them, as meaning is not inherent to them. According to this sociological perspective, the family is the interaction network of communication and meaning creation that is crucial for the shaping of the self (Rasheed et al., 2011).

The notion that subjective concepts have priority, as it is believed that humans act based on what they believe and not only on what is objectively real, and that society is believed to be socially constructed through human interpretation, inspired Carl Whitaker, Jay Haley, Virginia Satir and later the Milan group that placed emphasis on the interaction of the members of the family and its subsystems.

On the other hand, in structural, functional theories – mainly represented by Talcott Parsons – the social system is "a plurality of interaction networks through which two or more actors are in a mutual relationship and act collectively, utilising all means available to them". Parsons defines the social system as "a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other […] who are motivated in terms of tendency to the optimization of gratification and whose relation to the situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of cukurally structured and shared symbols" (Parsons 1951). Parsons (Devereux, 2003) discusses four functional prerequisites of social systems that include adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance. From a structural/functional perspective, the family's function is the socialisation of the children so that they can fit into society. Structurally, this concerns the family's institutional character and role in its social class, while functionally it refers to the services it offers to society, the roles and duties it distributes. The entire discussion in early family therapy concerning "family dysfunction" seems to echo this specific theoretical viewpoint.

The context of the people that discussed the context: Progressive Era and emerging therapy models

The period of social and political reform 1890-1920, is referred to in USA history as the "progressive era", where "progressives" believed that education and state intervention could reduce poverty and social injustice (Rasheed, 2011). Standardisation, mass production, industrialisation and labour control constituted part of the capitalist restructuring that became known as the second industrial revolution, and led to the deterioration of living standards for many American citizens.

The ideas of the European Enlightenment of the 18th century and modernism placed emphasis on the faith in reason, liberty and social progress. The Progressive Era was permeated by an optimistic sense that, through reason, science, technology and political initiatives the problems of society could be comprehended and improved. During this period, we see a development of the social worker's profession and the emergence of two movements: "the Charity Organization Society" that was guided by the belief that a family's failure to deal with the problems of living was due to individual personality defects, moral failures and environmental or societal factors, and the "Settlement House Movement" that shifted the orientation of intervention from the sense of "moral responsibility" towards that of "social responsibility".

Also, during the 30s and 40s, in an America far removed from the actual locations of the WWII fighting, significant progress is achieved in the field of group dynamics, with Lewin being its main representative. Lewin introduced terms such as leadership style, group productivity, group decision-making (Lewin, 1939), roles, norms, and group cohesion (Lewin, 1946). At the same time, we have a development of marriage counselling, practiced be various "experts", and the movement for mental health with Clifford Beers as its pioneer, who hoped to improve the conditions in large psychiatric hospitals and place emphasis in community care and prevention in childhood. In this light, Alfred Adler, and later on the Adlerian psychiatrist Rudolph Dreikurs view the child's emotional stability as reflective of that of the parents' and especially the mother's.

Influenced by Adler, Herbert "Harry" Stack Sullivan (1953) introduced interpersonal analysis that was based on the theory that both interpersonal relationships and social forces play a crucial part in shaping the self. Fried Fromm-Reichmann, a student and colleague of Sullivan, was working in a hospital for mentally disturbed patients in 1935. Through her work, she began to pay attention to the aetiology of schizophrenia through an interpersonal orientation. As she reports in 1948, "The schizophrenic is painfully

distrustful and resentful of other people, due to the severe early warp and rejection he encountered in important people in his childhood, as a rule, mainly in a schizophrenogenic mother". The work of these two psychiatrists gave a substantial push to the shift from the concept of the "autonomous self" to that of the "relational self", and the understanding of dysfunctional behaviour as related to dysfunctional family patterns. Of course, no model widened the focus of the lens so much as to include society and politics, which was something that occurred later.

The context of the people that discussed the context: Mechanisation of thought and rationalisation of the epistemological paradigm

Generally speaking, it seems that the main movement that has already begun taking shape from the mid-19th century with the industrial revolution is defined by the rationalisation of the epistemological paradigm and the mechanisation of sciences with the introduction of Reason. Even as far back as the 17th century, with Leibniz, the most influential renaissance philosopher, the "philosopher of order", the emerging sciences are founded on Reason. Leibniz worked mentally on establishing a rational order of human matters and relationships that according to his protestant ethics was the appropriate manner of praising and honouring the divine creation of the world.

In a very interesting and thorough analysis from a labour point of view (Sarajevo, 2018), one can see a crucial similarity of Taylorism in labour with Taylorism in thinking[2]. With Leibniz, there is a transition from religious, Christian ontology to mathematical ontology. In the course towards the establishment of the order of Reason, a large part of the creation of social relationships initially began to be excluded. With Leibniz, begins an era that we could describe as an "era of calculation". Boole will follow and will convert logic to algebra in an attempt to "mathematise" Aristotle's system of logical reasoning of "is" or "is not", to build the science of Logic and to construct its methodology. Aristotle sought the philosophy of logical reasoning. Leibniz dreamt up the mathematics of Logic and Boole made the decisive step to creating the mathematics of thinking.

Frege followed and made the strategic intersection – long before Saussure did – between the signifier and the signified, thus paving the way for the organisation of this distinction under the control of Logic, without having to resort to empirical verification of the concepts. Later on Godel and others followed, before Turing came along to make the crucial step towards mechanisation of all intellectual processes with the creation of algorithms. Calculation progressively becomes the sole acceptable order in the world. Calculation (I claim, you claim, I claim that you claim…) is "logic".

We will also encounter the aforementioned sequence in "The Pragmatics of Human Communication" (1967), which essentially is an approach of observation and research of human behaviour that is closer to mathematics than traditional psychology, because "mathematics is the discipline most immediately

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[2] Taylorism refers to the "scientific management of labour" with the general goal of controlling and configuring the flow of labour, the increase of productivity and the maximisation of profit. It essentially refers to the central "scientific management" of labour and, in general, is characterised by the mechanisation, fragmentation and distribution of labour in monotonous, repetitive duties with the creation of a production line. The term is named after the theoretician that proposed it, Frederic Winslow Taylor (1856-1915) and it was initially implemented in Ford factories.

concerned with the relations between, not the natures of, entities''. (Watzlawick et al., 1967: 22). The authors go as far as to envision that "Human behaviour may one day find its adequate expression in mathematical symbolism" (Watzlawick et al., 1967: 23). And one could say that the entire contemporary discussion regarding artificial intelligence and algorithms is founded in their theoretical models.

In the 19th century there was an intense contest and dialectical synthesis between what was evolving as philosophy and what was emerging as science. Progressively, the discussion concerning logic radically moved away from metaphysics and speculative philosophy and took a cognitive theoretical direction. It is a time where the concepts of the variable and the function are introduced as mathematical symbols.

We will encounter variables and functions in the works of the Palo Alto Group too (i.e. Watzlawick et al., 1967). Variables have their own meaning. They bear meaning only if one relates to another and their relevance is termed as function. Can one envision the extension of this in human behaviour? While I do something (i.e. shout), you do something else (i.e. leave the conversation or "shut" yourself in). This results in me shouting more and you leaving even more, which leads to a feedback circuit where one variable (shouting) depends on the other (distance).

Yet the person that introduced the concept of language as a system was Ferdinand de Sausssure (Sarajevo, 2018: 48-55, Saussure, 1979). Language is a system whose elements are interconnected and inter-defined, and no matter how much the system changes, if the elements and the relationship between them also change, it always remains a system that functions. This is a "paradigm shift", as the concept of "systems" originates from science, having already been established in chemistry, biology and physics (thermodynamics, mechanics etc.). "A language constitutes a system […] a complex mechanism that can be grasped only by reflection. The very ones that use it daily are ignorant of it" (Saussure, 1916). In essence, Saussure founds structuralism. Language does not copy reality but is instead arbitrary as there is no causal connection between the signifier (the word that describes and indicates an object) and the signified (the object). Thus, a new understanding of the world is established, in which conscious human constructs– regardless of their field – are subject to "non-conscious structures" that have their own organisation and dialectics that is far removed from conscious human control. It seems as though the Palo Alto Group attempted to transfer this philosophy to the family (structure, rules, equilibrium).

Discussion

Chronologically, we seek an epistemological starting point with Leibniz and passing through the algorithmification of thought we reach the digital representation of societies through big data, but also the constant search for a holistic point of view that will not only allow and endure ambiguity and uncertainty but will also desire and endure the reasonable, innate "miscommunication" that our relationships bear. The elimination of this miscommunication seems, presently, to be the target – at least partially – of artificial intelligence. This journey leads to certain questions that directly or indirectly concern what has been discussed here.

The first reasonable question to emerge is that if ultimately every scientific theory inevitably constitutes a product of its time, and is thus born in the vortex of socio-political events, what is the role of the social scientist as a political subject? Heims (1977) makes a lengthy reference of the socio-political questions developed by Bateson in his exchange with the two most important mathematicians of his time, Norbert Wiener and von Neuman. All three of them had taken part in the war and subsequently in the so-called

"Cold War". Bateson took part in the war alongside Margaret Mead from a controversial post of "black propaganda" (Price, 1998), undermining Japanese moral, and performed similar duties in China, India and Ceylon. Essentially, it involved the implementation of schismogenesis, of planting the seed of strife in a population, which will lead to dissension, paradoxical communication or inability to communicate. Is this not reminiscent of what happens today with fake news and the culture of contemporary journalism? Along the course, Bateson seemed to develop serious reservations regarding the role and position of scientists in wartime –contrary to his wife at the time. Ultimately, he talked about the dangers of the implementation of theories in society, seeing his role as a social scientist as that of somebody who would promote understanding rather than action. This led him to disagree with Mead, who was in favour of "applied anthropology" (Harries, 2021). Although he never expressed a clear anti-war view, like Russel did, whose logical types theories were the inspiration for the double bind, Bateson expressed openly his reservations regarding ethical issues, like for instance regarding the very popular in the 50s Games Theory (Heims,1997).

We believe that more research is necessary regarding questions that concern the direct or indirect role of social scientists in the implementation of politics and their formulation, and especially regarding the manner in which the work of the Palo Alto Group was utilised in projects like Project MK-Ultra, one of the darkest and most controversial chapters of CIA. It was a secret programme that sought and implemented thought control techniques from the beginning of the Cold War up until 1973 (Price, 2007). Concepts such as "Anti-Communist control techniques" and "confusion method" (with a direct reference to the methods utilised by Milton Erickson) are encountered in Project MK-Ultra. Let us not forget that Bateson was a friend of Harold Abramson, who was the Project MK-Ultra psychiatrist. They had co-authored papers, collaborated on experiments and discussed LSD effects (Bateson, 1960; Saltamacchia, 2018). Moreover, it is interesting to investigate the role of the "Society for the investigation of human ecology", as well as that of the Rockefeller Foundation in promoting and funding "social science".

We also know that von Neuman, one of Bateson's interlocutors concerning Games Theory and head mathematician of the Manhattan Project, is credited with the dogma of "Mutual Assured Destruction" (MAD), with contribution to the creation of the H-bomb and with the phrase "If you say why not bomb them (the Soviets) tomorrow, I say why not today? If you say at 5 o'clock, I say why not one o'clock?" (Blair, 1957). All these people and many others were in constant communication with each other, with the relationships sometimes becoming confrontational, which had severe political implications.

What meaning could all this have today? Do our words and actions – in the public sphere and behind closed doors – encompass a political position? What does make a stand mean? In the initial stages of the pandemic, for instance, we realised that individual responsibility emerged as the central concept. If, however, we approach communication not as a transfer of information but as a relational, emotional and dialectic process that includes individual responsibility among other things, what is our position when obedience to state directives is misrepresented as individual responsibility? And what is the (political) significance of directives coming from a politico-economic order that in Bateson's own words "is addicted to the consumption of Earth itself" (Harries-Jones, 2021)?

Could it be that a similar misrepresentation also occurs within psychotherapy rooms? Do "systemic scientists" today have a say regarding public issues, and if they do, how do they make their interventions? The answer is that this misrepresentation probably already occurs and we need to, at least, be aware of it. After all, as Totton (2000) states, when we talk about control, we talk about politics. He notes that

"Once we turn to psychotherapy itself, however, we find that defining the term is itself a political act, raising thoroughly political questions".

In conjunction with the above, the question of power emerges. In Palo Alto, directly or indirectly, a question was emphatically asked: "Who has the final word?" During the missile crisis, this question was the grounds for intense conflict within the group. The double-bind theory, for instance, went through significant modifications moving towards a more dialectic viewpoint of the concept of being trapped (Charalabaki, 2007). It took many years for the dialectical relationship of perpetrator and victim to be able to be seen inside the wider political and social context. When, for instance, the father of the "schizophrenic" son requests the authorities for his son to be involuntarily committed for having stabbed his mother , and the mother turns against the "strict father", it is unclear who the victim and who the perpetrator is? Especially when we know that the most probable outcome would be for the "schizophrenic" to be confined to a bed, being served a cocktail of psychiatric medications, and being deprived of the elementary dignity of even cleaning himself. Furthermore, there are increasingly more voices talking about the significance of looking at strength, and therefore power, within its context. Being a black, lesbian, female blue-collar worker in Greece has a different power position than being a white, straight psychiatrist. Similarly, there in an increase of the voices talking about the danger of victimisation through the constant reproduction of the position of the victim regarding refugees (Papadopoulos, 2019), or as it is expressed from a feministic point of view regarding gender issues (Schneider, 1993; Cole, 2007).

Ultimately, which of the philosophical, social, political movements inspire us and affect us today? Where do we find ourselves on Lyn Hofmann's braided Easter bread? Can we see our position, or do we need another person to find it for us? The questions have no easy answers. The dominant de-politicising and de-historicalising narrative attempts to create a homogenised "trans-historical" viewpoint of the evolution of ideas that eliminates the material and socio-political conditions in which our thought is shaped. Moreover, we know that in the context of modern capitalism, we can discuss our emotions, incorporate them in "therapeutic processes" and discuss our relationships but this has not necessarily helped us see our position in the world more clearly. In my opinion, the individual's constant motion is necessary inside the framework, as well as the constant motion away from psychology - that harbours the constant danger of psychologising – towards other research and interpretational fields with a constant awareness of the political dimension of our actions. It is clear that we are not talking only about a communication control discipline but also about a discipline of control through communication.

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