

Inventing Our Selves provides a radical new approach to the analysis of our current regime of the self, and the values of autonomy, identity, individuality, liberty, and choice that animate it. It draws upon the work of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and recent feminist scholarship on the body and the self to propose a novel genealogy of subjectivity. It argues that the “psy” disciplines – psychology in particular – have played a key role in “inventing our selves,” making visible and practicable certain features of persons, their conducts and their relations with one another, inventing new forms of expertise, transforming authority in a therapeutic direction, and changing the ethical techniques by means of which humans have come to understand and act upon themselves in the name of their truth. This is illustrated through studies of psy disciplines in factories, schools, clinics, the military, public opinion, and therapy. Nikolas Rose argues that the proliferation of psy has been intrinsically linked with transformations in “governmentality,” in the rationalities and technologies of political power in contemporary liberal democracies. The aim of this critical history is to diagnose our contemporary condition of the self, to destabilize and denaturalize what seems immutable, to elucidate the burdens imposed, the illusions entailed, the acts of domination and self-mastery that are the counterpart of the capacities and liberties that make up the contemporary individual.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521434140

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First published 1996

First paperback edition 1998, 2025

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-43414-0 Hardback

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Acknowledgments

The essays collected in this volume were written over a ten-year period from 1984 to 1994. In the original writing of the essays, and in developing them for publication in this form, I have been assisted by many people, and I would like to thank all those who have commented, criticized, and argued with the approach I have been advocating. I would like to express particular appreciation to three people: Peter Miller, with whom I have collaborated closely for many years on projects adjacent to the work presented here, and whose ideas have greatly enriched my own; Thomas Osborne, who has read, criticized, provoked, and supported my work over the past five years; and Diana Rose, who has, as ever, educated me on psychology, forced me to clarify my arguments, and given me some sense that this work is worth doing.

This volume was largely assembled while I was a Visiting Fellow in the Political Science Program of the Research School for Social Sciences of the Australian National University, and I would like to thank that institution, and my temporary colleagues in Canberra, for providing a most intellectually stimulating and congenial space for writing. In particular I would like to thank Barry Hindess for arranging my visit and for combining challenging discussion with generous hospitality. I would also like to thank my hosts in Melbourne, Deborah Tyler and David McCallum, and those who made me welcome in Brisbane, especially Jeffrey Minson, Denise Meredyth, and others at the School of Humanities at Griffith University for many stimulating conversations and happy hours. The final manuscript could not have been put together on schedule without the help of Diana Lee Woolf of Goldsmiths College.

Earlier versions of the material presented in Chapters 1 and 2 were published as “Identity, genealogy, history,” in S. Hall and P. du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1995), and “Power and subjectivity: Critical history and psychology,” in K. Gergen and C. Grauman, eds., *His-*

torical Dimensions of Psychological Discourse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). A different version of the argument in Chapter 1 was previously published in “Authority and the genealogy of subjectivity,” in S. Lash, P. Heelas, and P. Morris, eds., *De-traditionalization: Authority and Self in an Age of Cultural Uncertainty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). Chapter 2 also draws upon some parts of “Calculable minds and manageable individuals,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 1 (1988): 179–200.

An earlier version of Chapter 3 was published as “Psychology as a ‘social’ science,” in I. Parker and J. Shotter, eds., *Deconstructing Social Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 103–16.

The original version of Chapter 4 was presented at the 9th Cheiron-Europe Conference, Weimar, 4–8 September 1990. I have benefited from the comments made by those at the conference, and from the advice of an anonymous reviewer for *Science in Context*, where an earlier version was published as “Engineering the human soul: Analyzing psychological expertise,” *Science in Context*, 5, 2 (1992): 351–69.

The material in Chapter 5 was first presented at the International Conference for the History of the Human Sciences, University of Durham, September 1986. A rather different version of some of the same material was presented at a Symposium of the Group for the History of Psychiatry, Psychology and Allied Sciences at the University of Cambridge, September 1986. I would like to acknowledge the indebtedness of this paper to the work of Bruno Latour and Michael Lynch. Thanks also to Roger Smith and reviewers for the *History of the Human Sciences* for advice in relation to the version of the paper that was published there as “Calculable minds and manageable individuals,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 1 (1988): 179–200.

Chapter 6 is a revised and much extended version of a paper delivered at the 8th Cheiron-Europe Conference, Göteborg, Sweden, 30 August–3 September 1989. It also draws on arguments developed in *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1990), and formulated in the course of my work with Peter Miller on the Tavistock Clinic and Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. I would like to thank Diana Rose for her advice on social psychology during the preparation of this paper.

The argument in Chapter 7 was initially presented at a conference on the “The Values of the Enterprise Culture” held at Lancaster University in 1989 and published as “Governing the enterprising self,” in Paul Heelas and Paul Morris, eds., *The Values of the Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 141–64. Paul Heelas and Paul Morris gave helpful comments at an early stage.

Chapter 8 draws upon a variety of my published papers, but is presented in this version for the first time. Thanks to Mariana Valverde for her stimulating comments, which helped me refine the arguments in this chapter, and to Thomas Osborne, whose advice on a first draft of this chapter saved me from making even more errors of judgment than are undoubtedly contained in what I have written here.