A Paradigm Shift

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Abstract

Unpublished intervention by Félix Guattari at the panel "Critical analysis of the medical model and epistemological bases for new practices" at the *Third Meeting of the Latin American Network of Alternatives to Psychiatry* held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 17 to 21 December 1986. The original typewritten text is kept at the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine [IMEC] under the coast GTR.14.28. We warmly thank the Guattari family and IMEC for allowing us to publish this document.

The question of a paradigm shift in social practices arises, specifically in the "psy" field, in relation to the medical model; but it also refers, in a more general way, to the evolution of the procedures for modeling capitalistic subjectivity.

However, it is not easy to appreciate this evolution, because it seems to go in divergent directions. Capitalistic societies – under this term, I include both the Western capitalist countries and Japan, the countries of state socialism and the Third World countries, whose economies are highly integrated with the world market – massively produce, one can say industrially, an individual and collective subjectivity more and more subject to its own instances of power. One of the characteristics of the last period is that capitalism has managed to put the new information and communication technologies fully at his service, so to strengthen its regulation and control systems, and in order to integrate more and more closely into its workings not only the collective labor force, but also the intelligence, sensitivity, and even dreams and desires of each individual. A second fundamental characteristic of the present production of capitalistic subjectivity lies in the fact that it is correlative with the reactivation, the accentuation, the multiplication and the extension to the entire planet of internalized systems of segregation, hierarchization and guilt.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the development of the technological means on which this capitalism of a new kind supports its hegemony, at the same time fosters the emergence of innumerable aspirations for knowledge, for creativity and, correspondingly, for the conquest of new spaces of freedom. In fact, the prodigious rise of the computer revolution, robotic, telematics, genetic engineering, etc., is irreversibly transforming, before our eyes, the relations of man with his fellow as well as with his environment, his body, his work, to cultural, aesthetic objects...

Under these conditions, any fixation or any inclination to return to the old social structures, to the old ways of life, could only be an illusion and, symmetrically, any revolutionary Pol Pot-style forcing to purify collective subjectivity by force, could only be rejected without appeal. Whatever the impatience and historical nostalgia of some activists in this area, they will have to assume that social struggles and liberation movements have irremediably changed in nature. Even when imperialist repression still forces them, as in some Central American countries, to resort to traditional forms of militancy and military struggle, these movements will be led, at the same time, to take more and more account of what I have called "molecular revolutions", relating to women's emancipation, racism and the aspirations of minorities of all kinds…

Recent events in France have just confirmed this trend. After the dark period of about a decade that our country has passed, after the passivity and demoralization of the proponents of social progress, after the triumphant cynicism of neo-liberalism and postmodernism, a powerful movement has just emerged, whose main protagonists were students, high school students and young immigrants. It must be emphasized that the entry on the scene of these categories of population has all the more troubled and frightened the reactionary parties that it was made with a spirit of seriousness, a maturity, a realism, a concern for truth and a refusal of mass media manipulations that depart, it must be said, from past practices.

It is therefore against the contrasted background of a production of capitalistic subjectivity that is increasingly alienated and of the development of new marginal and dissident modes of subjectivation that is positioned our question of a paradigm shift in the domain said of mental health, shift that, to go quickly, I will describe as a passage from a technico-scientific paradigm (or which wants to be such, because it is, most often, only technocratic and imbued with an obsolete positivism), to an ethico-aesthetic paradigm, that is to say implying a moral responsibility, a micro-political commitment and calling, with regard to each concrete case, each particular situation, a creative attitude that I will relate to the generic theme of the re-singularization of praxis. The frames of reference of social life have been profoundly disrupted and the time has passed when could coexist in a sustainable and relatively stable manner, on the one hand, categories with well-established status, functions, advantages and privileges with, on the other hand, chronic and well-stabilized marginalities, composed of those who are assisted and those who are relegated by the dominant normality. From now on, on all the planet, it is the whole socius which is shaken by what I will call a fever of precariousisation. Nothing is guaranteed beyond the short term anymore. A larger and larger part of the population is definitely doomed to unemployment or, according to the continent, to total deprivation or even starvation. Each new generation sees its future fade in a blur thicker and thicker. Even salaried workers, the "guaranteed" as designated by the Italian operaists, even the civil servants and the executives see their status threatened by the jolts following the technological upheavals and the vagaries resulting from the strategies of the world

capitalism. The fate of the elderly, whose material and moral conditions are constantly deteriorating, should also be mentioned. But one would not finish enumerating the devastations bearing on the old modes of subjectivation, which also are frequently accompanied by a sort of conservative collective tenseness, a reterritorialization on the external signs of the old social order, ancient moral and religious values. Let's just note here that the traditional marginalities are relayed, if I may say so, in their potential challenge of the present social organization, by the rise of all these new categories of "rejected" secreted by the tormented, for not to say catastrophic, evolution of capitalist structures.

We will naturally find this questioning of the fixity of frames of reference in the cognitive status of norm systems. Thus, fifteen or so years ago, it still seemed obvious to tie physiological or mental normality to the nature of things by genetic strings or structural invariant. The example that has personally touched me the most is that of psychoanalysis, with Jacques Lacan's attempt to account for the life of the unconscious by avoiding its signified contents and refocusing it entirely on universal "mathemes" governing signifying chains. From this was to emerge a truly desiccated practice, blocking to analytic experience the entry of semiotic components escaping linguistic-type structures, literally severing its connections with the social field and rendering it unable to grasp the historical fluctuations of the production of subjectivity.

In place of all these conservative ways of thinking and acting, gradually emerge other who take better account of the characters of finitude and singular creation of psychic processes and who rediscover the polyvocity and the heterogeneity of semiotic and machinic components involved in the actual composition of their assemblages of enunciation. Thus, a whole thought of the self-reference and processes far from equilibrium is looking for itself, whose we can presume will eventually lead us out from the years of lead of structuralism and postmodernism.

From then on, it will become less and less legitimate to respect the disciplinary divisions that still preside over issues of assistance and care. Suffice it to simply evoke the absurdity of such professional fragmentation when they apply to the person of a drug addict. It is only too obvious, in this kind of "case", that the biological, psychiatric, psychoanalytical, psychosocial, etc. categories clash without mercy! It is not to deny the importance of knowledge, nor to underestimate the role of techniques, to recognize that they can only take their effective scope if they are properly inserted in social assemblages that offers the possibility individuals directly concerned to take back a significant part of their responsibility for their own fate. The problem, then, moves: it no longer consists simply of prescribing remedies according to a pre-established code, or of delivering inspired interpretations but, above all, of collectively reinforcing the links of the socius.

I have only sketched in an impressionistic manner a few themes related to the exit of assistance practices outside the medical paradigm. To conclude, I would like to add a few words about our Network of Alternatives to Psychiatry. Franco Rotelli was right to point

out that it should not confine itself to a simple attitude of protest against the current state of psychiatry, against the fate that continues to be made to the mentally ill, against the monstrous survival of carceral psychiatric hospitals, but that it was also its responsibility to experiment with new ways of producing subjectivity. In this, its investigations and its field experiences will inevitably lead it to go beyond the framework generally given to psychiatry and put its nose everywhere where something innovative happens in this field. From this point of view, I repeat, the situation in Europe is very complex. Fortunately, thanks to the renewed dynamism of the Trieste experience, the Network managed to pass without a hitch the course of the hardest years of social and cultural glaciation that swept our continent. We also had to do the grieving of our two great friends Franco Basaglia and David Cooper, whose disappearance, as you can imagine, would not only have emotional consequences! But now the Network, in connection with new attempts in Greece, Yugoslavia, Spain, sees encouraging prospects opening up before it. These, however, I am sure, will require from us ever more work of concertation, reflection and research. Certainly, in Latin America, the problems are different. They usually have a character of greater urgency, they are more massive, more dramatic. They call the constitution of broad fronts of struggle to denounce certain situations in an impasse. And I am confident that it will come out of this broad meeting, which has been made possible thanks to the tenacity and dedication of our Argentine friends, concrete initiatives that will initiate profound transformations in the psychiatry of this continent. However, I believe that this should not cause you to postpone the establishment, for your own benefit, of training and research programs. Otherwise, what you have gained in the field of institutional power relations, you will lose it at an operational level, due to a lack of preparation to effectively counter the dogmas and reductionist techniques of universities, schools of psychoanalysis, the systemic theorists of family therapy, and the like...

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