

Transcription of *De la psychothérapie institutionnelle considérée comme l'un des beaux-arts (Institutional Psychotherapy as one of the Fine Arts...)* (2025)
Translated by Jesse Newberg

The Wars

François Pain

Should we move on to the war?

Francesc Tosquelles

The war!

François Pain

It's a good transition...

Francesc Tosquelles

On Armistice Day, I went with my father to hang a white sheet from the balcony of my house, with red ties in the shape of letters, we wrote, in Catalan, "Visca la Pau" (Long Live Peace). Something like that. It was one of the first things I did in collaboration with my father; "Long Live Peace." But this peace, it was the peace of Europe's wars. It was a war that we Catalans had somewhat mythologized or mystified, because we expected it to give freedom to oppressed nationalities. And thus to Catalonia.

Jean Oury

Father Oury had three brothers Jean, Fernand, Gaston. They were all dead, killed at Verdun, such a horrible thing. It just happened, he was stricken for the rest of his existence. It's all he thought about.

The Spanish War

Francesc Tosquelles

And civil war, unlike war between one nation and another, has something to do with, precisely, the non-homogeneity of the *Ego*. Each one of us is made of glued together bits, with paradoxical unions and divisions inside each of us. A personality isn't made up of a single block. In that case, it would become a statue.

All of my activities there were setting up the sector, setting up therapeutic communities, and dealing with local politicians, with the various people who represented certain forces in the region. That's what the sector was all about*. But when I came to France, I was sure that we could do good psychiatry.

Not a theoretical certainty, but a practical one.

The Sept-Fonds Camp (**) is directed by Colonel Vigouroux

Vigouroux was very concerned, because a lot of people were committing suicide in the camp, and on the other hand, he was –like any good soldier– essentially an anti-psychiatrist, in the modern sense: he knew that if we sent a patient to Cahors or Montauban, it would be for the rest of his life. So he said to me, "what can we do?" I said "We need a service to be in the

camp but not *in* the camp, to treat these guys right away, on the spot." That's one of the places where I did really good psychiatry, in this concentration camp, in the mud. It was magnificent. On the other hand, it was used to promote escapes...stories like that.

Then one day I received a mysterious telegram from the Prefect of Lozère which simply said: "Doctor Tosquelle, would you accept a position in my hospital?.."

I arrived at St. Alban on January 6, 1940...

But first, I must say a word about what I said about the cultural explanations and elaborations of the French in general on the Spanish Civil War. They realized, après-coup, that if the French government or workers had supported the Spanish Civil War, if they had converted the Popular Front movement into a revolutionary movement, rather than paid vacations, the history of the world would have unfolded differently. But it is like Cleopatra's nose...Things are the way they are.

"The Soft Extermination"
In France 50,000 mentally ill starved to death

Jean Oury :

So it was, one might say, a favorable time; given that there were a lot of nurses returning from camps—either prison camps or even concentration camps—who arrived there, saw the deplorable conditions and said "we're not going to start working again after what we've just gone through."

They were very aware that there had to be something new, that the situation had to change!

That was a big part of it, that period—what we strangely call the post-war period. As if there was a post-war period! It never really ends...

Shit!
It's War Again!
(Meeting organized by "Canal Déchaîné" during the Gulf War)

Speaker

In this specific situation linked to the Gulf War, in Western society, isn't the mass media, as a means of producing subjectivity, in itself, superior, more aggressive, more powerful than all other producers of subjectivity combined?

Félix Guattari

Yes, I think so too. I think so more and more, yes. It's frightening. I think that it's making a very profound intervention into subjectivity. Maybe more profound than the other military campaigns....

But today, the idea is being preached everywhere that there is only one mode of development, only one mode of economic rationality, only one mode, finally, of subjectivity, only one mode of controlling opinions, feelings, education on the planet. Which is completely

false. Because if there is only one mode, this mode leads to a catastrophe, to a generalized implosion. On the one hand, an implosion on the planetary level, on the level of nations, but also on the level of individuals, the level of social groups.

But one essential condition to consider is that the struggles will not only take place at the economic level, at the political level, but at the level of subjectivity as well, in particular at the level of mass media. Hence, this perspective that I find interesting in your project, the idea of ushering in a post-media era, that is to say, reappropriating the mass media, not only in the manufacturing of information, the reconfiguration of information, but the reconfiguration of systems of collaboration, dialogue, the highlighting of sensibilities, the aesthetic reappropriation of the production of images and audio-visual production.

Ultimately, it's through this type of redefining struggles, social practices, mass media practices, etc., that other types of alternative polarities can be initiated and crystalized. Otherwise, it's hard to see that any of the existing left-wing movements, including the ecological movements in their current form will be able to make much headway in this field.

(*) *In psychiatry, the sector is a geographic and demographic division, organized within the framework of a public service for the prevention and treatment of mental disorders.*

(**) *The Sept Fonds camp was established at the end of the Spanish Civil War where Spanish Republican refugees were held. From 1939 onwards, it "welcomed" Jewish refugees fleeing Eastern Europe. It is located in the Tarn-et-Garonne department (South-West France), close to Toulouse. Francesc Tosquelles, like all Spanish exiles, was interned in the Septfonds camp, run by Colonel Vigouroux.*

The Double Alienation

Jean Claude-Polack

It was the 60s or thereabouts; the Club meeting. It was when the residents, over the summer, replaced the staff who took vacations and two or three of them could replace a worker and get paid! At a rate equal to what the staff member would make, but paid to the Club rather than to them directly. So in the Club there was a man, I remember him quite well, a catatonic type.

He had never worked. The only thing he said was, "I want a bike." To which people, both paid and unpaid, would reply: "Oh no, he doesn't do anything, he doesn't work. And what's more he wants a present..." etc.

And I recall one of Félix's interventions at the time. He said: "I just don't get it. The only question for us is to know what can we do to make him better? That's it! There's nothing else. So, I remember we bought him this bike. We went with him to buy it. And in the days that followed, he started talking to people, riding around on his bike...

Jean Oury

A nice example, isn't it?

Jean Claude Polack

...repairing bikes, etc. So at some point, it was necessary to make a bold gesture, one having an almost revolutionary significance in society, right? We give a gift to someone who has shown "himself to be incredibly lazy." This is one of the most distinctive features of institutional psychotherapy.

Jean Oury

That's it...not bad, right? Hold on to that one!

Jean Claude Polack

I spoke about this with them yesterday...

Jean Oury

It's a rupture in the usual economy.

In the organization of the economy. But this kind of resistance to economico-administrative logic shows up all the time. This resistance is either interpreted as "a bunch of delinquents," or as a chance to escape this heaviness, this alienation—to use a big word—to treat this alienation...there's a double alienation that needs to be considered: psychotic alienation, the alienation of the mad; and social alienation. A double alienation. And our work, of course, is to cure the mad. But we can't do that...What we call "curing the hospital" : it's social alienation after all. So we were in agreement. And there are a number of symptoms, even in schizophrenia, even in the content of delirium, that are related to social alienation.

We can see this clearly in the extraordinary example you gave of that guy: it's working with social alienation. A sort of meta...a dialectization of something. Even in schizophrenia there are symptoms—not at the level of primary or secondary symptoms; the fundamental symptoms, let's call them that—they really are mad! Then there's a number of symptoms that are worked on, added to, intertwined with the others but which have their origins in, let's say, social alienation.

Jean Claude Polack

Yes from the context

Jean Oury

And we see the people who arrive here who are "Whoa! Whoa!", finding themselves in an environment where everyone talks to each other—no matter who, no matter how, this touches on the level of social alienation.

T.O.G. :
(Collective Assemblage of Enunciation)

Jean Oury

There is no such thing as institutional psychotherapy, or anything else, in itself. There's the for-itself and the in-itself—Sartre and company—but it's not true; there's no in-itself. It's always going. It's always day one, after all!

That's not to say that there's no such thing as history, but it does call into question—in a grandiloquent way—the concept of history. We rely on it. On something.

But what is history? It's not about little events. It's about positions, political and otherwise, isn't it? With Tosquelles, for example, you can sense that there are historical positions.

Francesc Tosquelles

If I hadn't had a base of "cooperative," cooperativist, socialist culture—as you like! Of popular culture, you might say. Then I wouldn't have been able...to follow the path I did. You know what I mean? That's it, isn't it?

Félix Guattari

Tosquelles has certainly always positioned himself as a political activist. I repeat: it's not that he conveys political ideas, but that his way of being in any situation IS political.

Jean Oury

There are some who say: "He thinks he's Lacan..."

But I say: "You're wrong, the one I'm closest to, connected to, is Tosquelles."

And that is precisely what Tosquelles is all about: medicine, surgery, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and, at the same time, the structure of the hospital. In other words a permanent Political critique.

Francesc Tosquelles

From this perspective, political commitment led to an analysis of situations. My father was a man of conscience. It's how he thought. That was enough! However, I analyzed situations: the forces at play on a soccer field...in a psychiatric hospital, in the fields of Spain, the fields of Catalonia, and the relation of one thing to another.

It was always just a matter of examining the local geography and local forces in play.

Félix Guattari

This means that all of a sudden, there's a decentering of subjectivity, and a social object, a social practice becomes prevalent, takes precedence over a certain type of narcissistic performance, a certain type of immediate aim. The group, the logic of the group, the history of the group, its evolution, its insertion into a context, and even beyond that: "its mission," in quotation marks, takes on a different function.

I think that Tosquelles acted like this from the beginning, with the nuns of Saint-Alban and with all the staff, with all the caretakers... He acted with a sort of militant logic, an existential logic more than, I repeat, a history of content. And without this "crystalline" factor of enunciation, it seems the Alban-ese mayonnaise would not have held together.

From One machine to the other, a single flow**Félix Guattari**

So, as I was saying yesterday: the group subject is not only something that becomes autonomous by establishing its own coordinate systems and developing what we could call a "foreign policy"; that which develops a certain type of relation which then receives a vision of itself from the outside. As a result, the positions of individuals are, at the very least, overdetermined by this collective subjectivity, this subjective assemblage, a "group subject."

Moreover, it's the fact that this can, in certain circumstances, establish a reference value of meanings that are no longer in line with, or echo, the universes of meaning conveyed externally. It can be quite dramatic, the most stunning example being Pol Pot and the Cambodian communist party.

All of sudden, we witness sequences of total madness.

Or in the assembly of factions, in dogmatic movements, we see that there is another logic at work. The trials of Zinoviev, Bakunin, the Moscow trials, we can't understand them if we don't know that there can be, not just a kind of derangement of meaning, but a tipping point, a point of profound reorganization of meaning.

Of course this can all be chalked up to oppressive madness...we have seen the type of discourse to which this leads: "social practices are haunted by the Gulag," simplifying everything... But, in my opinion, we need to take things a little further.

It's because there's this possibility of a degree zero of sense, a stage that allows you to reset the direction of sense, that there's a possible genesis of other directions of sense. There is what I call a heterogenesis of sense: both heterogeneity and, at the same time, processual genesis from a kernel reset to zero.

So there's the idea of a cut, like a stage, like a stage in a theater, that cuts itself off from the ordinary rules of sense, and there's the idea that on this type of stage certain elements can take on a singularizing function that they wouldn't have had otherwise.

So, the institutional stage is one upon which a psychotic's symptom, or an accident in daily life, a temperamental demeanor, or something else that gets in the way of normal functioning: it could just as well concern the cleaning lady, the wife of the director, or the neighborhood psychotic: instead of remaining within a circular horizon, going round and round lifelessly, it could lead to something else, it could find a new way...it could establish a sort of baroque expansion of subjectivity.

And institutional psychotherapy demonstrated that we can go very, very far in this field..

What we are able to achieve with 150 people, or 180 at the La Borde clinic, is unheard of!

The number of things, activities...like an institutional music, a subjective music, are unimaginable in conventional institutions, in ordinary clinics and services. It's the possibility of creating a scene where objects that would otherwise be marginalized, rejected, discarded, take on the function of what Lacan calls *objet petit a*; that is, they start to become processual.

These *objets petit a* cling too tightly to the Freudian partial objects in Lacan. Instead, I prefer something much closer to Winnicott's transitional objects—or what I'd call institutional objects—and beyond these, operators of the production of subjectivity.

I'd like to detach this function that suspends meaning from the cumbersome, slightly too soma-based, too infra-structural, infrastructuro-somatic side, in order to articulate it in terms of dimensions, objects that are much more deterritorialized. That's basically the question.

Danièle Sivadon

Up until now, I had the impression that what gave Tosquelles's thinking its originality was as much his militant past as a particular affinity with psychosis?

Félix Guattari

Tosquelles's?

Danièle Sivadon

No, yours, because when you finally met him you weren't really...

Félix Guattari

I didn't have much of a problem encountering psychosis, given that I was a tad psychotic myself.

Danièle Sivadon

Maybe it's necessary but not sufficient!

Félix Guattari

Still, it helps! I can assure you that if you'd known me when I was 11 or 12...it would have been quite special.

I cured myself with my work in groups.

Deleuze had seen a bit of this: how my "Felix" dimension was a way of conjuring a being of stone...even so I'm not quite cured... It keeps the psychosis alive! No? Don't you think?

That's the truth. Because, as far as I'm concerned, I have questions, problems, and preoccupations that still remain just as new to me. Completely unchanged.

I always find it disorienting when people tell me, "Yeah, that's completely outdated...." I remember there was a guy who said to me—it wasn't very nice—"hey, Guattari! You're a has-been." Ok! Maybe so. "But that's all old news. Anti-Oedipus is completely outdated."

I haven't moved past anything. I'm in exactly the same...I can keep digging up the same problems. Oury is a bit like that too, we grind away...

Danièle Sivadon

With his incredible memory...

Félix Guattari

Yes! We grind away, and yet it's always the same stuff.

It's dreadful when it's time to re-read discussions we've recorded...all the years of the early 50s: we talked a lot, and some of those discussions were recorded and...so we always say the same thing... It's not the same words. It's not the same elaborations...but it's...

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