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CHAOSOPHY

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MOLECULAR REVOLUTIONS

There are a number of things I would like to share and discuss with you now, but I get the feeling that I could talk about absolutely anything—my private life, how I vote—except desire or revolution. They would seem truly obscene here at Columbia University.*

It has reached the point where I wonder if one wouldn't really have to be a member of the CIA in order to undertake such a thing.¹ There is something like a CIA virus here that seems to have contaminated many people and that keeps reoccurring at different times, and I can't help asking myself whether I haven't caught the bug.

If one could get beyond these walls or through this muffling that constitutes a sort of wall of sound within the university, I think one might begin to recognize that the world crisis is accelerating at a considerable pace. Am I simply caught up in an accelerating schizo-process? For some years now we have been experiencing a process comparable to that of 1929—a full range of regional conflicts, of local political confrontations, of economic crises. There are no extreme, salient characters of a Hitler or Mussolini magnitude on the political scene right now, yet extermination camps do exist. The entire country of Bangladesh is such a camp; thousands, tens of thousands of people are dying there, or on the verge of it, because they are locked in a particular economic situation, which results from

* Guattari is addressing here the Schizo-Culture Conference organized by Semiotext(e) in November 1975 at Columbia University.

a specific governmental policy, and no alternatives exist except being exterminated. I do believe that a whole series of factors are leading to an absolute crisis at all levels of social organization throughout the world. This situation should call for revolutionary solutions, but nothing, no one, no organization is prepared to deal with it and its imperatives. The obscene thesis I wish to defend before you now is this: all these organizations—Bolshevik, Marxist-Leninist, Communist, Spontaneist (in one form or another), Social Democratic—are missing an essential aspect of this revolutionary struggle and its development.

There are two ways of rejecting the revolution. The first is to refuse to see it where it exists; the second is to see it where it manifestly will not occur. These are, in a nutshell, the reformist and the dogmatic pathways. Indeed, a revolution of great amplitude is developing today, but at the molecular or microscopic level.

I believe that this molecular revolution can only develop in a parallel way with the general, political crisis. Some people say that the social turmoil in the United States during the 1960s, or in France in '68, was a spontaneist event—transitory, marginal—and that such a utopian revolution leads nowhere. But in my opinion, important things began happening only *after* that revolution, which perhaps was the last revolution in the old style. Molecular revolution develops in relatively unknown areas. Gilles Deleuze was just telling us² there isn't much to try to understand. We see students rebelling, playing at the barricades. We see teenagers changing life in the high schools. We see prisoners setting half the French prisons on fire. We see the President of the French Republic shaking hands with the prisoners. Women's revolts are moving in all sorts of directions, at many levels: against inherited politics, on the problem of abortion, on the question of prostitution. We see the struggles of immigrants or ethnic minorities, the struggle of homosexuals, of drug users, of mental patients. We even find previously unimaginable social categories being mobilized in France, for example some judges ...

When we put this all together on the table, side by side, we may ask: what does all this have in common? Can we use all this to start a revolution? Does this have anything to do, for example, with what is going on right now in Portugal, where officers of the colonial army are playing the Cohn Bendits?³ We can certainly dismiss these phenomena as marginal, try to recoup them as excess force, which is precisely the attitude most of the groupuscules have; or—and this is my hypothesis—we can assume that the molecular revolution of which I spoke is located and developing here in an irreversible manner and that each time these movements fail because the old forms and structures of organization take power, holding the rhizomatic element of desire in a system of arborescent power. Therefore, the main question for me is a radical change of attitude with regard to political problems. On the one hand, there are the “serious” things one sees in the papers, on television—the questions of power in the parties, the unions, the groupuscules. On the other hand, there are the little things, the things of private life: the militant’s wife who stays at home to look after the children, the petty bureaucrat making deals in the corridors of Congress—these are at the root of most political schisms and assume a programmatic aspect, but are invariably linked to the phenomena of bureaucratic investment and the special caste that runs these organizations.

I believe that revolutionary movements, whatever they may be, do not change their orientation because of ideology. Ideology does not weigh very heavily compared to the libidinal trafficking that effectively goes on among all these organizations. It all comes to the same thing: either political objectives are the echo of all kinds of struggles, and are associated with an analysis of the phenomena of desire and of the social unconscious within the present organizations, or else the bureaucratic impasses and recuperations will necessarily recur, the desire of the masses and of interest groups will go through representatives, and result from a representation.

We all have experienced these kinds of militant initiatives. We should be able to understand why things work that way, why desire is being delegated to representatives and bureaucrats of all kinds, why revolutionary desire is turned into organizational microfascism.

Certainly there must be a more powerful investment that comes to replace revolutionary desire. My explanation, provisionally, arises from the fact that capitalist power is not only exercised in the economic domain and through the subjugation of class, nor is it exercised only through police, foremen, teachers, and professors, but also on another front which I would call the *semiotic subjugation* of all individuals. Children begin learning about capitalism in the cradle, before they have access to speech. They learn to perceive capitalist objects and relations on television, through the family, in the nursery. If they somehow manage to escape semiotic subjugation, then specialized institutions are there to take care of them: psychology, psychoanalysis, to name but two.

Capitalism cannot successfully put together its work force unless it proceeds through a series of semiotic subjugations. The difficult thing—and one that raises a basic theoretical problem—is how to conceive the articulation and unification of struggles on all these fronts: the front of traditional political and social struggle; the liberation of oppressed ethnic groups and regions; linguistic struggles; struggles for a better neighborhood, for a more communal way of life; struggles to change family life or whatever takes the place of it; struggles to change modes of subjugation that recur in couples, whether heterosexual or homosexual. I put all these struggles under the term “microfascist,” although I don’t particularly like it. I use it simply because it startles and annoys people. There is a microfascism of one’s own body, of one’s organs, the kind of bulimia that leads to anorexia, a perceptual bulimia that blinds one to the value of things, except for their exchange value, their use value, to the expense of the values of desire.

This raises an important theoretical question, a question that, for me, Deleuze, and several others, has changed somewhat lately. We thought the most formidable enemy was psychoanalysis because it reduced all forms of desire to a particular formation, the family. But there is another danger, of which psychoanalysis is but one point of application: it is the reduction of all modes of semiotization. What I call *semiotization* is what happens with perception, with movement in space, with singing, dancing, mimicry, caressing, contact, everything that concerns the body. All these modes of semiotization are being reduced to the dominant language, the language of power which coordinates its syntactic regulation with speech production in its totality. What one learns at school or in the university; is not essentially a content or data, but a behavioral model adapted to certain social castes.

What you require of your students before all else when you make them take an exam is a certain style of semiotic moulding, a certain initiation to the given castes. This initiation is all the more brutal in the context of manual formation, with the training of workers. Exams, the movement from position to position in factory work, always depend on whether one is Black, Puerto Rican, or raised in a well-to-do neighborhood, whether one has the right accent, is a man or woman. There are signs of recognition, signs of power that operate during instructional formation, and they are veritable rites of initiation. I have taken the example of the university, I could easily have taken examples from many other formations of power.

Dominant power extends the semiotic subjugation of individuals unless the struggle is pursued on every front, particularly those of power formations. Most people don't even notice this semiotic subjugation; it's as though they do not want to believe it exists, yet this is what political organizations with all their bureaucrats are about; this is what contributes to create, engender, and maintain all forms of recuperation.

There is something that interests me very much in the United States. It has been happening for a number of years, notably with the Beat generation, and is probably due to the very acuteness of the problems concerning the semiotics of the body, of perception. This is much less true in Europe where one is tied down to a certain intellectualist conception of relations and of the unconscious. The various rationalizations or justifications that are given here for reintroducing a semiotics of the body interest me less. Some involve Zen Buddhism, or various forms of technology, like the Tai Chi that was being done just now on the stage ... It seems to me that something is being sought there in some sort of blind way. Blindness takes multiple forms. In France, for example, we have networks of gurus in psychoanalytic societies; we even have a personality like Reverend Moon heading an important psychoanalytic organization. But psychoanalysis only involves a particular set of people. In the United States, apparently, the virus of psychoanalysis has been more or less averted, but I sometimes wonder if its hierarchical systems aren't reproduced in the systems of gurus, the systems for representing desire.

The problem is this: one cannot strive toward a political objective without identifying as well all the microfascisms, all the modes of semiotic subjugation of power that reproduce themselves through that struggle, and no myth of a return to spontaneity or to nature will change anything. However naïvely one assumes to be innocent in this regard, whether in relation to our children, our partner, or our students (for professors), I believe this innocence is equivalent to guilt and engenders guilt. The question is neither of innocence or guilt but of finding the microfascism one harbors in oneself, particularly when one does not see it. The last thing I would want to bring up here, of course, is that it can receive an individual solution. It can only be dealt with a new type of *arrangement of enunciation*. One example of these arrangements of enunciation—an impossible,

truly awful arrangement from the vantage point of the arrangements of desire—is that of this room itself, with some individual raised above everyone else, with a prepared discussion which would make it impossible for anyone really to start a discussion. Yesterday I proposed changing the whole format, the whole type of work we are doing here, and to my great surprise, I realized that everyone wanted the conference to remain as it was. Some people even asked for their money back, although no one here was being paid to speak.⁴

At various times there were attempts to produce this kind of dialogue. The only people who came forward to try and start a dialogue—completely phony, but full of real desire—were those who falsely accused us of being CIA agents.

As one invests in the libidinal economy of the micropolitics of desire, of microfascism, so must one precisely identify the alliances and possibilities that exist concretely at the level of political struggles and which are completely different in nature. I once told Jean Jacques Lebel, regarding his workshop on Portugal, that the judgment one makes concerning the attitude of the Portuguese Communist Party is necessarily different from Spinoza's and his own, and yet the mechanisms of bureaucratization and the ignorance about the desire of the masses are comparable in both cases.

Another example. In France we have some groups, gangs of people who wear swastikas on their backs and who walk around covered with all sorts of fascist insignia. Yet one should not confuse their microfascism with the fascism of political groups like Occident, etc. To the extent that one fights microfascism at the molecular level, one can also prevent it from happening at the level of large political groups. If one believes that each one of us is immunized against microfascist contamination, against semiotic contamination by capitalism, then we can surely expect to see unbridled forms of macrofascism well up.

DESIRE IS POWER, POWER IS DESIRE

Answers to the Schizo-Culture Conference

Félix Guattari: After a systematic attack (at least I think so) on psychoanalysis, Gilles Deleuze and I began asking ourselves about the linguistic and semiotic conceptions underlying formations of power in psychoanalysis, in the university, and in general.

A sort of generalized suppression of what I call the *semiotic components of expression* takes place in a certain type of writing, such that even when people speak, they speak as if they were writing. At the same time, the rules of their speech not only depend on a certain syntax, but on a certain *law of writing*.

Unlike primitive societies, our society doesn't think much of speech—only writing, writing that is signed, attested. Subjugation in capitalist societies is basically a semiotic subjugation linked to writing. Those who escape writing give up any hope of survival. They end up in specialized institutions. Whether at work or in any other area of life, one must always make sure that the semiotic modes one uses relate to a phenomenon of the law of writing. If I make a gesture, it must relate to a text that says: "Is it appropriate to make this gesture at this point?" If my gesture is incoherent, there will be, as in a computer, some written or digitalized device that will say: "This person may be mad, or drugged, perhaps we should call the police, or maybe he is a poet: that individual belongs to a certain society and should be referred to a written text." I think, therefore, that the problem posed in this colloquium—

whether to read certain texts or not—is basically a problem of the formation of power that goes beyond the university.

Question: *Doesn't this relate to what Antonin Artaud said about the written text?*

Absolutely. Artaud understood theater and cinema in their multiplicity of semiotic components. Most of the time a film is based on a written text, a script, and the plastic and aural elements are referred to, and alienated from, the text.

Isn't it more a question here of linearity rather than of writing, strictly speaking?

Certainly, or what could be called digitalization, putting everything into digits.

Is the problem of linearity specific to capitalism, or is there a form of writing specific to capital?

Yes, I believe so. The whole evolution of systems of enunciation tends toward the individuation of enunciation and toward the degeneration of collective arrangements of enunciation. In other words, one moves toward a situation where the entirety of complex systems of expression—as in dance, tattoo, mime, etc.—is abandoned for an individuation that implies the position of a speaker and an auditor, such that the only thing that remains of a communication is the transmission of information quantified in “bits.” Yet, in another arrangement, the essence of communication is a communication of *desire*. A child who plays, or a lover who courts someone, does not transmit information, he creates a richly expressive situation in which a whole series of semiotic components are involved.

Capitalism refuses to take these components into consideration; what it wants is: 1) people to express themselves in a way that confirms the division of labor; 2) desire to be only expressed in a way that the system can recoup, or only if it is linearized, quantified in systems of production. A number of people here have remarked that linearization is the best way of transmitting data for a given purpose, even in genetic systems. For example, consider what happens in a primitive society when a purchase is made. The purchase is often a body linked to interminable discussions; it is more often like a donation, even though it is presented as an exchange. Today, shopping ideally demands that the salesperson behaves like a computer. Even if the salesperson is someone affable, and displays all the iconic components of seduction, she nonetheless seduces according to a precise code. Her skirt must be a certain length, her smile artificial, etc. The best way for capitalism to insure semiotic subjugation is to encode desire in a linear way. Whether in a factory or a bank, capitalism does not want people who bring the totality of what they are, with their desire and their problems. One doesn't ask them to desire, to be in love, or to be depressed; one asks them to do the work. They must suppress what they feel, what they are, their entire perceptive semiotics, all their problems. To work in capitalist society implies isolating the usable quantity of semiotization which has a precise relation to a law of writing.

That's questioning capitalism in an extremely broad sense.

Clearly, one must also include bureaucratic socialism.

To take up the question of linearity again, what consequence follows, according to you, from the critique and rejection of the Oedipal triangle in Lacan? What is the impact of such a critique in terms of revolutionary action; not just as critical exegesis, but as intellectual praxis?

To me, the Lacanian definition of the unconscious seems particularly pertinent if one remembers that it forgets the unconscious of the capitalist socialist bureaucratic social field. What, in fact, does Lacan say? He says that the unconscious is structured like a language and that a signifier represents the subject for another signifier. One gains access to the unconscious through representation, the symbolic order, the articulation of persons in the symbolic order, through the triangle and castration. In fact, and this is really what it's all about, desire can only exist insofar as it is represented, as it passes through representatives. Otherwise, one falls into the black night of incestuous indifferentiation of drives, etc. For the whole question lies here; if one follows Lacan closely to the end, what does he ultimately say? You accede to desire by the signifier and by castration, and the desire to which you accede is an impossible desire.

I think that Lacan is completely right in terms of the unconscious of the capitalist social field, for as soon as someone represents our desire, as soon as the mother represents the desire of the child, as soon as the teacher represents the desire of the students, as soon as the orator represents the desire of the audience, or the leader, the desire of the followers, or ourselves in our ambition to be something for someone who represents our desire (I've got to be "macho," or else what will she think of me), then there is no more desire. I think the position of the subject and the object in the unconscious is one that continually implies not a metaphysical, general subject, but a particular subject, a type of particular object in a definite socioeconomic field. Desire as such escapes the subject as well as the object, and in particular the series of so-called partial objects. Partial objects of Psychoanalysis only appear in a repressive field. For those who remember Freud's monograph *The Little Hans*, the anal partial object appears when all the other objects have been forbidden, the little girl next door or crossing the street, going for

a walk, sleeping with the mother, or masturbating—then, when everything has become impossible, the phobic object appears, the phobic subject appears.

Systems of signification are always linked with formations of power and each time the formations of power intervene in order to provide the significations and the significative behaviors, the goal is always to hierarchize them, to organize and make them compatible with a central formation of power, which is that of the state, of capitalist power mediated by the existence of a national language, the national language being the machine of a system of general law that is differentiated into as many particular languages as will specify the particular positions of each one. The national language is the instrument of translatability which specifies each person's way of speaking. An immigrant does not speak the same way as a teacher, as a woman, as a manager, etc., but in any case each is profiled against a system of general translatability. I do not believe one should separate functions of transmission, of communication, of language, or the functions of the power of law. It is the same type of instrument that institutes a law of syntax, that institutes an economic law, a law of exchange, a law of labor division and alienation, of extortion, of surplus value.

And yet I am so talkative myself that I don't see how one could accuse me of denying language and power. It would be absurd to go to war against power in general. On the contrary, certain types of politics of power, certain types of arrangements of power, certain uses of language, notably national languages, are normalized in the context of a historical situation, which implies the seizure of power by a certain linguistic caste, the destruction of dialects, the rejection of special languages of all kinds—professional as well as infantile or feminine (see Robin Lakoff's study)—I think that is what happens. It would be absurd to oppose desire and power. Desire is power; power is desire. What is at issue is what type of politics is pursued

with regard to different linguistic arrangements that exist. Because—and this seems essential to me—capitalist and socialist-bureaucratic power infiltrate and intervene in all modes of individual semiotization today, they proceed more through semiotic subjugation than through direct subjugation by the police, or by explicit use of physical pressure. Capitalist power injects a micro-fascism into all the attitudes of the individuals, into their relation to perception, to the body, to children, to sexual partners, etc. If a struggle can be led against the capitalist system, it can only be done, in my opinion, through combining a struggle—with visible, external objectives—against the power of the bourgeoisie, against its institutions and systems of exploitation, with a thorough understanding of all the semiotic infiltrations on which capital is based. Consequently, each time one detects an area of struggle against bureaucracy in the organizations against reformist politics, etc., one must also see just how much we ourselves are contaminated by, are carriers of, this microfascism

Everything is done, everything organized in what I will call the *individuation of the enunciation*, so that one is prevented from taking up such work, so that an individual is always coiled up in himself, his family, his sexuality, so that such work of liberation is made impossible. Thus, this process of fusing a revolutionary political struggle with analysis is only conceivable on condition that another instrument be forged. In our terminology (i.e., with Gilles Deleuze), this instrument is called a collective arrangement of enunciation. This doesn't mean it's necessarily a group: a *collective arrangement of enunciation* can bring both people and individuals into play—but also machines, organs. This can be a microscopic endeavor, like that of certain characters we find in novels (I am thinking of Beckett's *Molloy*); it can be transcendental meditation or a group work. But the collective arrangement of enunciation is not a solution by the group. It is simply an attempt to create opportunities

of conjunction between different semiotic components in order that they not be systematically broken, linearized, separated.

In the previous talk, the person who was “discoursing” came to me and said: “If I spoke a long time, all at once, it was because I felt inhibited, because I could not speak.” We did not function as a collective arrangement of enunciation; I didn’t manage to relate my own inhibition about hearing him with his inhibition about speaking. It always comes back to the idea that if you abandon the discourse of reason, you fall into the black night of passions, of murder, and the dissolution of all social life. But I think the discourse of reason is the pathology, the morbid discourse par excellence. Simply look at what happens in the world, because it is the discourse of reason that is in power everywhere.

In your collective arrangement of enunciation, how do you prevent the reimposition of linearity and syntax?

It would also be absurd to want to suppress the information, the redundancies, the suggestions, the images all the powers-that-be want to suppress. The question, then, is not semiotic, or linguistic, or psychoanalytic—it is political. It consists in asking oneself where the emphasis is put—on the politics of significative redundancy or on the multiple connections of an entirely different nature.

You have to be more precise. You speak of semiotics, of information, of collective arrangements of enunciation, i.e., of linguistics, and then you displace your argumentation from the linguistic or psychological system to that of politics. I no longer follow you.

Each time it is the same thing. Let’s take a concrete example: teaching writing in school. The question is often posed in a different, global method. Society being made as it is, even in a completely

liberated school, one can hardly imagine refusing to teach children how to write or to recognize linguistic traffic signs. What matters is whether one uses this semiotic apprenticeship to bring together Power and the semiotic subjugation of the individual, or if one does something else. What school does is not to transmit information, but to impose a semiotic modeling on the body. And that is political. One must start modeling people in a way that ensures their semiotic receptiveness to the system if one wants them to accept the alienations of the bureaucratic capitalist-socialist system. Otherwise they would not be able to work in factories or offices; they would have to be sent away to asylums, or universities.

Do you completely reject the system of knowledge elaborated by Lacan through linguistics and Psychoanalysis?

Completely. I believe Lacan described the unconscious in a capitalist system, in the socialist-bureaucratic system. This constitutes the very ideal of Psychoanalysis.

But is it valid as a system for describing this system?

Certainly. Psychoanalytic societies (and this is why we pay them dearly) represent an ideal, a certain model that can have great importance for the other domains of power—in the university and elsewhere—because they represent a way of making sure desire is invested in the signifier and only the signifier, in pure listening, even the silent listening of the analyst. It is the ideal of semiotic subjugation pushed to its highest expression.

According to Nietzsche, one assumes or goes beyond one's own weaknesses in adjusting oneself to them, in refining them. Yet Nietzsche is a

reactionary. Is it possible for someone who is a radical to propose going further into psychoanalytic discourse and industrial discourse?

First of all, I am no Nietzschean. Second, I do not think of going beyond my weaknesses. Third, I am soaked to my neck in psychoanalysis and in the university, and I do not see what I could bring to this domain. All the more so since I do not believe that anything can be changed by a transmission of information between speaker and listener. This is not, then, even a problem of ideological striving or of striving for truth, as one could have understood it here. It is simply this: either there will be other types of arrangement of enunciation in which the person will be a small element juxtaposed to something else (beginning with me), or there will be nothing. And worse than nothing: the development of fascism in continuous linear fashion is taking place in many countries, and there you have it.