

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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\* 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 us<sup>2</sup> 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?<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.