

## The Group and the Person<sup>1</sup>

### A fragmented balance-sheet

To follow so many other speakers on the theme of society, the responsibility of individuals, militants, groups and so on, creates a certain inhibition. It is a minefield, with questioners hidden in fortified dug-outs waiting to attack you: what right has he to speak? what business is it of his? what is he getting at? And professional academics are there too, to recall you to modesty, and systematically to restrict any approach to these problems that is remotely ambitious.

Not even ambitious, necessarily, but related to responsibility. For example, we may study this or that text of Marx or Freud, we may study it in depth, seeing it in the context of the general trends of the period; but very few people will agree to pursue that study into its bearing on the present day, on its implications for, say, the development of imperialism and the Third World, or a particular current school of thought.

In different places and different circumstances I have put forward different ideas. For instance I have spoken of the 'introjects of the super-ego', of the capacity of dependent groups to allow the individual super-ego a free rein. I have tried to suggest procedures for institutional analysis, seeking more or less successfully to introduce flexibility. Today I want to go further, but once again there is this inhibition. The best way to tackle it is, I think, to try to express my ideas just as they come into my head.

The first question is: what can it possibly do for 'them'? Do I really need to say any more, and to expose myself yet again? The people and groups I have known and argued with go about their business with little concern for institutional analysis: history takes its course, and all groups tend to follow their routine until their path is diverted in some way or other by an obstacle, whether from within or without.

No, that is not precisely true: the militant groups with whom I am still in touch, institutional therapy groups and the groups in the FGERI,<sup>2</sup> have not

1. First given as a talk to a working group at La Borde in 1966, and put into writing in April 1968.

2. Fédération des Groupes d'Étude et de Recherche Institutionnelle (Federation of Institutional Study and Research Groups), producing the review *Recherches*, published in Paris.

been without interest in the subject; it is just that they take it for what it, on the whole, is – ideas picked up here and there from Marx, Freud, Lacan, Trotskyist criticism and so on. Some indeed think that quite enough is already going on, and that the time spent absorbing those ideas could well be used for thinking about something else.

It seems to me, on the contrary, that if our theories are not properly worked out, we are in danger of floundering about, wasting our efforts at collective thinking, and letting ourselves be carried away by psycho-sociologically inspired trends of thought or be caught up by the demands of the super-egos of hard-line militant groups.

Take one hard-liner, Louis Althusser:

The proletarian revolution also needs militants who are scholars (historical materialism) and philosophers (dialectical materialism) to help to defend and develop its theory . . . The fusion of Marxist theory with the workers' movement is the greatest event in the whole of human history (its first effect being the socialist revolutions). Philosophy represents the class struggle in theory. The key function of the practice of philosophy can be summed up in a word: tracing a line of demarcation between true and false ideas. As Lenin said, 'The entire class struggle may at times be contained in the battle for one word rather than another. Some words fight among themselves, others are the cause of equivocation, over which decisive, but undecided, battles are fought . . .'<sup>3</sup>

Amateurs keep out! I still want to say things as they come to mind without being on guard all the time, but I have been warned. Without realizing it, the class struggle lies in wait at every corner – especially since intellectuals lack what Althusser calls 'class instinct'. It seems that the class struggle can come down to a collision between classes of words – the words of 'the class' against the words of the bourgeoisie. Does it really matter so much what one says? One Trotskyist group did me the honour of devoting over half of a sixteen-page pamphlet to a vehement denunciation of my tedious theories of group subjectivity. I almost collapsed under the weight of their accusations: petit-bourgeois, impenitent idealist, irresponsible element! 'Your false theories could mislead good militants.'<sup>4</sup> They compared me to Henri de Man, a Nazi collaborator sentenced in his absence to forced labour when the war was over. It makes you think . . .

To return to the point. My inhibitions, as you can see, can be expressed only by being dressed up in external statements, and now that I am using quotations as weapons of debate, I will offer some more in the hope of salvation:

3. 'La Philosophie comme arme de la révolution', *La Pensée*, no. 138, April 1968.

4. *Cahiers de la Vérité*, 'Sciences humaines et lutte de classes' series, no. 1, 1965 (General Editor: Pierre Lambert): 'Indeed the theories of M. Guattari and his friends are themselves an alienation . . .' (p. 16).

Where a powerful impetus has been given to group formation neuroses may diminish and at all events temporarily disappear [says Freud]. Justifiable attempts have also been made to turn this antagonism between neuroses and group formation to therapeutic account. Even those who do not regret the disappearance of religious illusions from the civilized world of today will admit that so long as they were in force they offered those who were bound by them the most powerful protection against the danger of neurosis. Nor is it hard to discern that all the ties that bind people to mystico-religious or philosophico-religious sects and communities are expressions of crooked cures of all kinds of neuroses. All of this is correlated with the contrast between directly sexual impulsions and those which are inhibited in their aim.<sup>5</sup>

As you see, Freud did not dissociate the problem of neurosis from what is expressed in the term 'collective grouping'. For him there is a continuity between the states of being in love, hypnosis and group formation. Freud might well authorize me to say whatever I liked from a free association of these themes. But the hard-liners once again seize the microphone: 'That's all very well when you're talking of neurosis or even institutional therapy, but you have no right to say whatever you please in the highly responsible field of the class struggle . . .'

The point upon which I feel most uncertain, and militant groups are most intransigent, is that of the group's subjectivity. ' . . . production also is not only a particular production. Rather, it is always a certain social body, a *social subject*, which is active in a greater or sparser totality of branches of production.'<sup>6</sup> Oh yes, I am well aware that when Marx talks like that of a social subject he does not mean it in the way I use it, involving a correlate of phantasmizing, and a whole aspect of social creativity which I have sought to sum up as 'transversality'. All the same, I am glad to find in Marx – and no longer the 'young Marx' – this re-emergence of subjectivity.

Well now, this quotations game has repercussions on a register of the unconscious level. I have only to read them out, and the spectre of guilt recedes, the statue of the Commander the victim of intemperance, all is well – I can now say whatever I like on my own account. I am not going to try to produce a theory basing the intrinsic interlinking of historical processes on the demands of the unconscious. To me that is too obvious to need demonstrating. The whole fabric of my inmost existence is made up of the events of contemporary history – at least in so far as they have affected me in various ways. My phantasies have been moulded by the '1936 complex', by that wonderful book of Trotsky's, *My Life*, by all the extraordinary rhetoric of the Liberation, especially those of the youth hostelling movement, anarchist

5. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), ed. J. Strachey, in Vol. xviii of the Complete Works, Hogarth Press, 1955, pp. 67–143.

6. Karl Marx, *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857), published as the Introduction in *Grundrisse* (Pelican Marx Library, 1973).

groups, the UJRF,<sup>7</sup> Trotskyist groups and the Yugoslav brigades, and, more recently, by the saga of the 'Communist menace' – the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Algerian war, the War in Vietnam, the left wing of the UNEF,<sup>8</sup> and so on and so on.

Yet I also like that kind of inwardness I see in Descartes, seeking to find strength from within himself, and the ultra-inward writing of people like Proust and Gide; I like Jarry, Kafka, Joyce, Beckett, Blanchot and Artaud – just as in music I like Fauré, Debussy and Ravel. Clearly, then, I am a divided man: a petty bourgeois who has flirted with certain elements of the workers' movement, but has kept alive his subscription to the ideology of the ruling class. If Althusser had been there, I should have had to make my choice, and I might well have found myself in the serried ranks of those indispensable agents of any social revolution – the theory-mongers. But this brings us back to square one – the same problem has to be faced all over again. For whom do I speak? Am I really only one of those pathetic agents of the academic ideology, the bourgeois ideology, who try to build a bridge between the classes and so contribute to integrating the working class into the bourgeois order?

Another figure to whom I owe a lot is Sartre. It is not exactly easy to admit it. I like Sartre not so much for the consistency of his theoretical contribution, but the opposite – for the way he goes off at tangents, for all his mistakes and the good faith in which he makes them, from *Les Communistes* or *La Nausée* to his endeavours to integrate Marxist dialectic into the mainstream of philosophy, which has certainly failed. I like Sartre precisely because of his failure; he seems to me to have set himself against the contradictory demands that were tormenting him and to have remained obsessed with them; he appears to have resolved no problem, apart from never having been seduced by the elegance of structuralism, or the dogmatism of some of Mao Tse-tung's more distinguished adherents. Sartre's confusions, his naïvetés, his passion, all add to his value in my eyes. Which brings me back to the slippery slope: humanism, preserving our values and all that.

Of course, that is only as long as the individual unconscious and history do not meet, and the topology of the Möbius strip as delineated by Lacan is not a means of getting from one to the other. As far as I am concerned, posing the question is something of a device, for I am convinced – as experience of psychoses and serious neuroses makes absolutely clear – that, beyond the Ego, the subject is to be found scattered in fragments all over the world of history: a patient with delusions will start talking foreign languages, will

7. UJRF: Union des Jeunesses Républicaines de France (the youth movement of the French Communist Party).

8. UNEF: Union Nationale des Étudiants de France.

hallucinate history, and wars and class conflicts will become the means of his/her own self-expression.

All this may be true of madness, you may say, but history, the history of social groups, has nothing to do with such madness. Here again, I show my fundamental irresponsibility. If only I could content myself with itemizing the various areas of phantasy in which I can find security! But then I would remain condemned to going back and forth in a dead end, and would have to admit that I have merely yielded to the external constraints that were part and parcel of each of the situations that made me. Underlying my different options – being-for-history, being-for-a-particular-group, being-for-literature – is there not some search for an unthinking answer to what I can only call being-for-existence, being-for-suffering?

The child, the neurotic, every one of us, starts by being denied any true possession of self, for the individual can only speak in the context of the discourse of the Other. To continue with the quotation from Freud I gave earlier on,

If he is left to himself, a neurotic is obliged to replace by his own symptom formations the great group formations from which he is excluded. He creates his own world of imagination for himself, his own religion, his own system of delusions, and thus recapitulates the institutions of humanity in a distorted way which is clear evidence of the dominating part played by the directly sexual impulses.<sup>9</sup>

The established discourse of the groups of young people that I belonged to, the established discourse of the workers' organizations I encountered in the fifties, the philosophical discourse of the bourgeois university, literary discourse, and all the other discourses, each had its own consistency and its own axioms, and each demanded that I adapt myself to it in order to try and make it my own. At the same time, these successive attempts at mastering discourses actually formed me by fragmenting me – since that fragmentation itself was, on the plane of the imaginary, simply the first beginning of a more profound reuniting. After reading a novel, I would find a whole new world opening up before me in, say, a youth hostel, quite another in political action and so on. My behaviour was thus affected by a kind of polymorphism with more or less perverse implications. Different social bodies of reference were expecting me to make a decision on one level or another, and to become established in some identifiable role – but identifiable by whom? An intellectual? A militant? A professional revolutionary? Perhaps, but in the distance I began to hear something saying, 'You are going to be a psychoanalyst.'

Note, however, that these different orders must not be seen on the same level. A certain type of group initiation has its own special imprint: real

militant activity in a reified social context creates a radical break with the sense of passivity that comes with participation in the usual institutions. It may be that I shall later on come to see that I was myself contributing a certain activism, an illusion of effectiveness, a headlong rush forward. Yet I believe that no one who had the experience of being a militant in one of those youth organizations or mass movements, in the Communist Party or some splinter group, will ever again be just the same as everyone else. Whether there was real effectiveness hardly matters; certain kinds of action and concentration represent a break with the habitual social processes, and in particular with the modes of communication and expression of feeling inherited from the family.

I have tried to schematize this break, this difference, by distinguishing between the subject group and the object group. This involves to some extent reopening the question of the distinction between intellectuals and manual workers, a slight chance of taking up the desire of a group, however concealed it may be, a chance of escaping from the immutable determinism whose models come from the structure of the nuclear family, the organization of labour in industrial societies (in terms of wages and of hierarchy), the army, the church and the university.

A small group of militants is something apart from society; the subversion it plans is not usually directed to something in the immediate future, except in such exceptional cases as that of Fidel Castro or the Latin American guerrillas. Its horizon is the boundary of history itself: anything is possible, even if in reality the universe remains opaque. Something of the same sort exists in institutional pedagogy and institutional psychotherapy. Even in impossible, dead-end situations, one tries to tinker with the institutional machinery, to produce an effect on some part of it; the institutions acquire a kind of plasticity, at least in the way they are represented in the sphere of intention.

Castro, at the head of hundreds of thousands of Cubans, unhesitatingly went to war against what he called 'organigrammism', or planning from the centre. This is something that is a problem throughout all the so-called socialist societies. A certain concept of the institution, which I should call non-subjective, implies that the system and its modifications exist to serve an external end, as part of a teleological system. There is a programme to fulfil, and a number of possible options, but it is always a question of responding to specific demands to produce – production here being taken in the widest sense (it can refer to entertainment or education as well as to consumer goods). The production of the institution remains a sub-whole within production as a whole. It is a residue, suggesting what Lacan calls the *objet petit 'a'*. What are the laws governing the formation of institutions? Is there not a general problem of the production of institutions?

9. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 142.

One could say that revolutions produce institutions; the creative rumblings that unleashed the French revolution were luxuriant in this respect. But beware of spelling revolution with a capital R. Things happened by way of successive modifications, and any master plan remained entirely abstract and never put into effect: this is evident in, for instance, the successive constitutions drafted by the French revolution. Only with the history of the workers' movement since Marx have we seen a conscious plan setting out to produce non-utopian institutional models for reorganizing the structure of the State – with a view to its future withering away – for starting up a revolutionary power, for setting up political and trade-union bodies aiming (at least in theory) to fulfil the demands of the class struggle. It is noteworthy that organizational problems have often more truly engendered splinter groups, major battles, even schisms, than have ideological divergences; and with Leninism, the problem of organization became the primordial one. Debates about the party line, the signified and the signification were very often no more than a front to conceal what was at issue at the level of the organizational signifier, which at times went down to the tiniest detail. Who should control this or that authority? How should the unions be related to the party? What was to be the role of the soviets?

There is of course a general problem about the subjective processes of 'breakthrough groups' throughout history, but for the moment I want simply to focus the idea of the subject group on the birth of revolutionary groups.<sup>10</sup> These groups make a special point of linking, or trying to link, their organization options very closely with their revolutionary programme. Historically, we can point to one great creative event that was stifled by the hegemony of Stalinism in the USSR and in the Communist International. Even today, most revolutionary tendencies still see organizational problems in the framework within which they were formulated fifty years ago by Lenin. Imperialism, on the other hand, seems to have been capable of producing relative institutional solutions enabling it to escape from even the most catastrophic ordeals. After the crisis of 1929 it produced the New Deal; after the Second World War it was able to organize 'reconstruction' and re-mould international relations. These were, of course, only partial measures, effected by trial and error, since the dominant imperialism had formulated no consistent policy or aims. But in the terms of production, they have enabled imperialism to remain considerably in advance of the so-called socialist States in its capacity for institutional creativity. But in the socialist States none of the major projects of reform since 1956 has yet seen the light of day. In this respect it is the difference that is crucial. At the time of the first Five Year Plan, Russia was introducing capitalist production plans into its factories.

10. It would be particularly interesting to apply this idea to popular religious heresies.

Even today, in both the technological and the industrial fields, the organization of production and even the internal structure of companies are still largely dependent on the models set up by capitalism. We are also seeing the importation into Russia and Czechoslovakia of the capitalist pattern of mass consumption of cars. It looks as though the planned structure of the socialist States is not capable of permitting the emergence of any form of original social creativity in response to the demands of different social groups. Very different was the situation after the 1917 revolution, before the Stalinist terror took over. Though the soviets rapidly degenerated at the mass level, there were some intensively creative years in a number of specific areas – cinema, architecture, education, sexuality, etc. Even Freudianism made considerable progress. The 1917 revolution is still charged with a powerful group Eros, and it will long continue to exercise that power: the vast forces of social creativity unleashed by it illuminated the field of research in all spheres.

We may well be witnessing the dawn of a new revolutionary development that will follow on from that sombre period, but we are still too close to the daily events of history to see it clearly. The extraordinary way that bureaucratization took place in the Bolshevik Party and the soviet State under Stalin seems to me comparable to neurotic processes that become more violent as the instincts underlying them are more powerful. The Stalin dictatorship could never have taken so excessive a form had it not needed to repress the fastest-flowing current of social expression the world has ever known. It must also be recognized that the voluntarism of the Leninist organization and its systematic mistrust of the spontaneity of the masses undoubtedly led it to miss seeing the revolutionary possibilities represented by the soviets. In fact there never was any real theory of soviet organization in Leninism: 'All power to the soviets' was only a transitional slogan, and the soviets were soon centralized to suit the Bolsheviks' determination to maintain absolute control of all power in view of the rise of counter-revolutionary attack from both within and without. The only institutions that remained important were the State power, the Party and the army. The systems of organizational decentralization established by the Bolshevik Party during the years of underground struggle disappeared in favour of centralism. The International was militarized willy-nilly, and the various organizations in sympathy with Bolshevism were made to accept the absurd 'Twenty-One Points'. Enormous revolutionary forces all over the world thus found themselves arbitrarily cut off from their proper social context, and some Communist bodies never really recovered. (The Communist movement was unable, above all, to become established and organized in vast areas of what we today call the Third World – presumably to indicate that it is 'a world apart'.)

The same pattern of organization (Party – Central Committee – Politburo – secretariat – secretary-general; and mass organizations, links between

Party and people, etc.) is just as disastrous in the international Communist movement as a whole. The same sort of militant superstructures, established in a revolutionary context, are supposed to supply to the organizational needs of a highly industrialized socialist State. This absurdity is productive of the worst bureaucratic perversions. How can the same handful of men propose to direct everything at once – State bodies, organizations of young people, of workers and of peasants, cultural activity, the army, etc., etc. – with none of the intermediate authorities having the least autonomy in working out its own line of action? Whether or not it gives rise to contradictions with this tendency or that, or to confrontations that cannot be resolved simply by arbitration from above.

Never has the internationalist ideal fallen so low! The reaction of the pro-Chinese movements has been to preach a return to Stalinist orthodoxy, as revised and corrected by Mao Tse-tung, but in fact it is hard to see how they will resolve these fundamental problems. At the end of the last century, a militant was someone formed by the struggle, who could break with the dominant ideology and could tolerate the absurdity of daily life, the humiliations of repression, and even death itself, because there was no doubt in his mind that every blow to capitalism was a step on the way to a socialist society. The only context in which we find such revolutionaries today is that of guerrilla warfare, of which Che Guevara has left us such an extraordinary account in his *Testamento político*.

The political or syndical style of the Communist organizations of today tends to be totally humourless. The bureaucrat experiences politics and syndicalism in the short term; he is often felt to be an outsider at work, even though his comrades recognize the merits of what he is doing, and rely on him – at his request – as one would rely on a public service. There are exceptions, a great many indeed, who are genuine militants of the people in those organizations, but the party machine mistrusts them, keeping them on a tight rein, and ends up by destroying them or trying to expel them.

It is always the mass of the people who have created new forms of struggle: it was they who 'invented' soviets, they who set up *ad hoc* strike committees, they who first thought of occupations in 1936. The Party and the unions have systematically retreated from the creativity of the people; indeed, since the Stalin period, they have not merely retreated but have positively opposed innovation of any kind. One has only to recall the part played by the communists in France at the Liberation, when they used force as well as persuasion to reintegrate into the framework of the State all the new forms of struggle and organization that had emerged. This resulted in works committees without power, and a Social Security that is merely a form of delayed wages to be manipulated by management and the State so as to control the working class and so on.

It may be said that the working class must simply effect a 'restitution' of these subjective procedures, that they must become a disciplined army of militants and so on. Yet surely what they are seeking is something different – they want to produce a visible aim for their activities and struggles. To return to the notions I put forward provisionally, I would say that the revolutionary organization has become separated from the signifier of the working class's discourse, and become instead closed in upon itself and antagonistic to any expression of subjectivity on the part of the various sub-wholes and groups, the subject groups spoken of by Marx. Group subjectivity can then express itself *only* by way of phantasy-making, which channels it off into the sphere of the imaginary. To be a worker, to be a young person, automatically means sharing a particular kind of (most inadequate) group phantasy. To be a militant worker, a militant revolutionary, means escaping from that imaginary world and becoming connected to the real texture of an organization, part of the prolongation of an open formalization of the historical process. In effect, the same text for analysis of society and its class contradictions extends into both the text of a theoretical/political system and the texture of the organization. There is thus a double articulation at three levels: that of the spontaneous, creative processes of the masses; that of their organizational expression; and that of the theoretical formulation of their historical and strategic aims.

Not having grasped this double articulation, the workers' movement unknowingly falls into a bourgeois individualist ideology. In reality, a group is not just the sum of a number of individuals: the group does not move immediately from 'I' to 'you', from the leader to the rank and file, from the party to the masses. A subject group is not embodied in a delegated individual who can claim to speak on its behalf: it is primarily an intention to act, based on a provisional totalization and producing something true in the development of its action. Unlike Althusser, the subject group is not a theoretician producing concepts; it produces signifiers, not signification; it produces the institution and institutionalization, not a party or a line; it modifies the general direction of history, but does not claim to write it; it interprets the situation, and with its truth illuminates all the formulations coexisting simultaneously in the workers' movement. Today, the truth of the NLF in Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam illuminates the whole range of possibilities for struggle against imperialism that now exist, and reveals the real meaning of the period of peaceful coexistence that followed the Yalta and Potsdam agreements. Today, too, the struggle of revolutionary organizations in Latin America brings into question all the formulations of the workers' movement and all the sociological theories recognized by the bourgeois mind. Yet one cannot say that Che Guevara, Ho Chi-minh, or the leaders of the NLF are producers of philosophical concepts: it is revolution-

any action that becomes speech and interpretation, independent of any formal study and examination of the totality of what is said and done. This does not mean that one has no right to say anything – on the contrary, one can say what one wants all the more freely precisely because what one says is less important than what is being done. *Saying* is not always *doing*!

This brings us to a more general problem: does 'saying' mean anything more than the production of its own sense? Surely, what the whole analysis of *Capital* makes clear is precisely that behind every process of production, circulation and consumption there is an order of symbolic production that constitutes the very fabric of every *relationship* of production, circulation and consumption, and of all the structural orders. It is impossible to separate the production of any consumer commodity from the institution that supports that production. The same can be said of teaching, training, research, etc. The State machine and the machine of repression produce *anti-production*, that is to say signifiers that exist to block and prevent the emergence of any subjective process on the part of the group. I believe we should think of repression, or the existence of the State, or bureaucratization, not as passive or inert, but as dynamic. Just as Freud could talk of the dynamic processes underlying psychic repression, so it must be understood that, like the odyssey of things returning to their 'rightful place', bureaucracies, churches, universities and other such bodies develop an entire ideology and set of phantasies of repression in order to counter the processes of social creation in every sphere.

The incapacity of the workers' movement to analyse such institutions' conditions of production, and their function of anti-production, dooms it to remain passive in the face of capitalist initiatives in that sphere. Consider, for instance, the university and the army. It may appear that all that is happening in a university is the transmission of messages, of bourgeois knowledge; but we know that in reality a lot else is also happening, including a whole operation of moulding people to fit the key functions of bourgeois society and its regulatory images. In the army, at least the traditional army, not a great deal of what happens is put into words. But the State would hardly spend so much, year after year, on teaching young men just to march up and down; that is only a pretext: the real purpose is to train people, and make them relate to one another, with a view to the clearly stated objective of discipline. Their training is not merely an apprenticeship in military techniques, but the establishment of a mechanism of subordination in their imaginations. Similar examples can be found in so-called primitive societies: to be a full member of the tribe, one has to fulfil certain conditions; one must successfully undergo certain ceremonies of initiation – that is, of social integration by means perhaps of mingling one's blood with a primordial totemic image, and by developing a sense of belonging to the group. And, in fact, underlying the rational account one may give of such group phenomena,

phantasy mechanisms of this nature are still at work in capitalist societies.

The workers' movement seems to be peculiarly unfitted to recognize those mechanisms; it relates subjective processes to individual phenomena, and fails to recognize the series of phantasies which actually make up the real fabric of the whole organization and solidity of the masses. To achieve any understanding of social groups, one must get rid of one kind of rationalist-positivist vision of the individual (and of history). One must be capable of grasping the unities underlying historical phenomena, the modes of symbolic communication proper to groups (where there is often no mode of spoken contract), the systems that enable individuals not to lose themselves in interpersonal relationships, and so on. To me it is all reminiscent of a flock of migrating birds: it has its own structure, the shape it makes in the air, its function, its direction – and all determined without benefit of a single central committee meeting, or elaboration of a correct line. Generally speaking, our understanding of group phenomena is very inadequate. Primitive societies are collectively far better ethnologists than the scholars sent out to study them. The gang of young men that forms spontaneously in a section of town does not recruit members or charge a subscription; it is a matter of recognition and internal organization. Organizing such a collective depends not only on the words that are said, but on the formation of images underlying the constitution of any group, and these seem to me something fundamental – the support upon which all their other aims and objects rest. I do not think one can fully grasp the acts, attitudes or inner life of any group without grasping the thematics and functions of its 'acting out' of phantasies. Hitherto the workers' movement has functioned only by way of an idealist approach to these problems. There is, for instance, no description of the special characteristics of the working class that established the Paris Commune, no description of its creative imagination. Bourgeois historians offer such meaningless comments as that 'the Hungarian workers were courageous', and then pass on to a formal, self-enclosed analysis of the various elements of social groups as though they had no bearing on the problems of the class struggle or organizational strategy, and without reference to the fact that the laws governing the group's formations of images are different in kind from contractual laws – like those relative to setting up a limited company, for instance, or the French Association Law of 1901. You cannot relate the sum of a group's phantasy phenomena to any system of deductions working only with motivations made fully explicit at the rational level. There are some moments in history when repressed motives emerge, a whole phantasy order, that can be translated, among other things, into phenomena of collective identification with a leader – for instance Nazism. The individual 'I' asks *where* the image is, the identifying image that makes us all members of 'Big Boy's' gang rather than 'Jojo's'; Jojo is that dark fellow with the motor-bike,

whereas it may be someone – anyone – else who has the characteristics demanded by the phantasy world of this particular group. Similarly, the great leaders of history were people who served as something on which to hang society's phantasies. When Jojo, or Hitler, tells people to 'be Jojos' or 'be Hitlers', they are not speaking so much as circulating a particular kind of image to be used in the group: 'Through that particular Jojo we shall find ourselves.' But who actually says this? The whole point is that no one *says* it, because if one were to say it to oneself, it would become something different. At the level of the group's phantasy structure, we no longer find language operating in this way, setting up an 'I' and an other through words and a system of significations. There is, to start with, a kind of solidification, a setting into a mass; *this is us*, and other people are different, and usually not worth bothering with – there is no communication possible. There is a territorialization of phantasy, an imagining of the group as a body, that absorbs subjectivity into itself. From this there flow all the phenomena of misunderstanding, racism, regionalism, nationalism and other archaisms that have utterly defeated the understanding of social theorists.

André Malraux once said on television that the nineteenth century was the century of internationalism, whereas the twentieth is the century of nationalism. He might have added without exaggeration that it is also the century of regionalism and particularism. In some big cities in America, going from one street into the next is like changing tribes. Yet there is an ever-increasing universality of scientific signifiers; production becomes more worldwide every day; every advance in scholarship is taken up by researchers everywhere; it is conceivable that there might one day be a single super-information-machine that could be used for hundreds of thousands of different researchers. In the scientific field, everything today is shared; the same is true of literature, art and so on. However, this does not mean that we are not witnessing a general drawing inwards in the field, not of the real, but the imaginary, and the imaginary at its most regressive. In fact, the two phenomena are complementary: it is just when there is most universality that we feel the need to return as far as possible to national and regional distinctness. The more capitalism follows its tendency to 'de-code' and 'de-territorialize', the more does it seek to awaken or re-awaken artificial territorialities and residual encodings, thus moving to counteract its own tendency.

How can we understand these group functions of the imaginary, and all their variations? How can we get away from that persistent couple: machinic universality and archaic particularity? My distinction between the two types of group is not an absolute one. I say that the subject group is articulated like a language and links itself to the sum of historical discourse, whereas the dependent group is structured according to a spatial mode, and has a

specifically imaginary mode of representation, that it is the medium of the group phantasies; in reality, however, we are dealing not so much with two sorts of group, but two functions, and the two may even coincide. A passive group can suddenly throw up a mode of subjectivity that develops a whole system of tensions, a whole internal dynamic. On the other hand, any subject group will have phases when it gets bogged down at the level of the imaginary: then, if it is to avoid becoming the prisoner of its own phantasies, its active principle must be recovered by way of a system of analytic interpretation. One might perhaps say that the dependent group permanently represents a potential sub-whole of the subject group,<sup>11</sup> and, as a counterpoint to the formulations of Lacan, one might add that only a partial, detached institutional object can provide it with a basis.

Take two other examples:

First, the psychiatric hospital. This is a structure totally dependent on the various social systems that support it – the State, Social Security and so on. Group phantasies are built up around finance, mental illness, the psychiatrist, the nurse, etc. In any particular department, however, a separate objective may be established that leads to a profound reordering of that phantasizing. That objective might be a therapeutic club. We may say that that club is the institutional objective (Lacan's *objet petit 'a'*, at the institutional level) that makes it possible to start up an analytic process. Clearly the analytical structure, the *analyser*, is not the therapeutic club itself, but something dependent upon that institutional objective, which I have defined elsewhere as an institutional vacuole. It might, for example, be a group of nurses, psychiatrists or patients that forms that analytical, hollow structure where unconscious phenomena can be deciphered, and which for a time brings a subject group into being within the massive structure of the psychiatric hospital.

Second, the Communist Party. Like its mass organizations (trade unions, youth organizations, women's organizations, etc.) the Party can be wholly manipulated by all the structures of a bourgeois State, and can work as a factor for integration. In a sense one can even say that the development of a modern, capitalist State needs such organizations of workers by workers in order to regulate the relations of production. The crushing of workers' organizations in Spain after 1936 caused a considerable delay to the progress of Spanish capitalism, whereas the various ways of integrating the working class promoted in those countries that had popular fronts in 1936, or national fronts in 1945, enabled the State and the various social organizations introduced by the bourgeoisie to readjust, and to produce new structures and new relations of production favouring the development of the capitalist

11. This would be a way out of Russell's paradox, a way of avoiding reifying it as a totalizing whole.



economy as a whole (salary differentials, wages, bargaining over conditions, etc.). Thus one can see how, in a sense, the subordinate institutional object that the Party or the CGT (the Communist Trade Union Federation) represents as far as the working class are concerned helps to keep the capitalist structure in good repair.

On the other hand – and to explain this calls for a topological example of some complexity – that same passive institutional object, indirectly controlled by the bourgeoisie, may give rise within itself to the development of new processes of subjectivation. This is undoubtedly the case on the smallest scale, in the Party cell and the union chapel. The fact that the working class, once its revolutionary instincts have been aroused, persists in studying and getting to know itself through this development within a dependent group creates tensions and contradictions which, though not immediately visible to outsiders (not quoted in the press or the official statements of the leaders), still produce a whole range of fragmented but real subjectivation.

A group phantasy is not the same as an individual phantasy, or any sum of individual phantasies, or the phantasy of a particular group.<sup>12</sup> Every individual phantasy leads back to the individual in his desiring solitude. But it can happen that a particular phantasy, originating within an individual or a particular group, becomes a kind of collective currency,<sup>13</sup> put into circulation and providing a basis for group phantasizing. Similarly, as Freud pointed out, we pass from the order of neurotic structure to the stage of group formation. The group may, for instance, organize its phantasies around a leader, a successful figure, a doctor, or some such. That chosen individual plays the role of a kind of signifying mirror, upon which the collective phantasy-making is refracted. It may appear that a particular bureaucratic or maladjusted personality is working against the interests of the group, when in fact both his personality and his action are interpreted only in terms of the group. This dialectic cannot be confined to the plane of the imaginary. Indeed, the split between the *totalitarian* ideal of the group and its various *partial* phantasy processes produces cleavages that may put the group in a position to escape from its corporized and spatializing phantasy representation. If the process that seems, at the level of the individual authority, to be over-determined and hedged in by the Oedipus complex is transposed to the level of group phantasizing, it actually introduces the possibility of a revolutionary re-ordering. In effect, identification with the prevailing images of the group is by no means always static, for the badge of membership often has links with narcissistic and death instincts that it is hard to define. Do

12. This is the difference between my idea of group phantasy and Bion's idea of the phantasy of the group.

13. And, conversely, is not the individual phantasy the individuated small change of collective phantasy production?

individual phantasies take shape and change in the group, or is it the other way round? One could equally say that they are not fundamentally part of anything outside the group, and that it is a sheer accident that they have fallen back on that particular 'body' – an alienating and laughable fiction, the justification of an individual driven into solitude and anxiety precisely because society misunderstands and represses the real body and its desire. In either case, this embodying of the individual phantasy upon the group, or this latching on of the individual to the group phantasy, transfers onto the group the damaging effect of those partial objects – *objet petit 'a'* – described by Lacan as the oral or anal object, the voice, the look and so on, governed by the totality of the phallic function, and constituting a threshold of existential reality that the subject cannot cross. However, group phantasizing has no 'safety rail' to compare with those that protect the libidinal instinctual system, and has to depend on temporary and unstable homeostatic equilibria. Words cannot really serve to mediate its desire; they operate on behalf of the law. Groups opt for the sign and the insignia rather than for the signifier. The order of the spoken word tips over into slogans. If, as Lacan says, the representation of the subject results from one signifier relating to another, then group subjectivity is recognizable rather in a splitting, a *Spaltung*, the detachment of a sub-whole that supposedly represents the legitimacy and 'totality' of the group.

In other words, this remains a fundamentally precarious process. The tendency is to return to phenomena of imaginary explosion or phallicization rather than to coherent discourse. From this point of view, apart from distinguishing between individual and group phantasy, one can also distinguish different orders of group phantasy: on the one hand, the basic phantasies that depend on the subordinate character of the group and, on the other, the transitional phantasies connected with the internal process of subjectivation corresponding to various reorganizations within the group. We are led to distinguish two possible types of object: established institutions, and transitional objects.<sup>14</sup> With the first, the institution never sets out to face the *problem* of the institutional object, though it is obsessed by it; just as the church has its God and has no wish to change him, so a dominant class has power and does not consider whether it might not be better to give that power to anyone else! With the second, on the other hand, a revolutionary movement is a good example of something that keeps asking whether it is right, whether it should be totally transforming itself, correcting its aim and so on. Of course all the institutional objects in a fixed society continue to evolve regardless, but their evolution is not recognized. One myth is replaced by another, one religion by

14. The notion of an *institutional object* is complementary to the 'part object' of Freudian theory and the 'transitional object' as originally defined by D. W. Winnicott (cf. *La Psychanalyse*, 5, Presses Universitaires de France, 1959).



another, which may result in a ruthless war and end in deadlock. When a monetary or economic system collapses, bad money drives out good, the gold standard is replaced by base metal, and the economy is convulsed. Similarly when a marriage fails; it was based on a contract of a kind not fundamentally different from a banking contract, and there is no scope for development. The contract can be changed by divorce, but that is only a legal procedure and does not fundamentally solve anything. Indeed the chain is snapped at its weakest link: the children are split in two without any thought of consequences in the sphere of the imaginary. When a revolutionary party changes theories, however, there is no logical reason why it should lead to a tragedy, or a religious war: the regimen of the word still tries to readjust the old formulations to bring them into harmony with the new.

To foster analysis and intervention in group phantasy (including family groups) would imply a consideration of precisely these phenomena of the imaginary. Take another example: generations of miners have worked in a particular mine, and it has become a kind of religion to them; one day, the technocrats suddenly realize that the coal they produce is no longer profitable. This of course takes no account of the effect on the miners: those of a certain age are told that they are to retire early, while others are offered re-training schemes. Similar things happen in Africa, Latin America and Asia, where peoples who have had the same social organization for thousands of years are steamrollered out of existence by the intrusion of a capitalist system interested only in the most efficient ways of producing cotton or rubber. These are extreme examples, but they are the logical extension of a multitude of situations – those of children, of women, of the mad, of homosexuals, of blacks. In disregarding or failing to recognize such problems of group phantasy, we create disasters whose ultimate consequences may be immeasurable.

Analysing the institutional object means channelling the action of the imagination between one structure and another; it is not unlike what happens to an animal in the moulting season. To move from one representation of oneself to another, though it may involve crises, at least retains continuity. When an animal loses its coat it remains itself, but in the social order, removing the coat shatters the world of the imaginary and annihilates generations. When the group is split up, when it does not know the scope of its phantasies and has no control of them, it develops a kind of schizophrenic action within itself: the phantasy mechanisms of identification, and of the self, operate all the more freely and independently as the function of the word as a collective utterance is replaced by a structural formation of non-subjective utterances. While the group discourses in a vacuum about its aims and purposes, identifications have the same kind of free rein as they would have in a schizophrenic whose speech is disconnected from bodily representation,

and whose phantasy world, freed from reality, can operate on its own to a point of hallucination and delusion. A group will end up by hallucinating with its phantasies in just the same way. If it is to interpret them, it will have to resort to irrational acts, wild gestures, suicidal behaviour, play-acting of all kinds, until those phantasies can find some means of becoming present to themselves and manifesting themselves in the order of representation.

I said earlier that the unconscious is in direct contact with history. But only on certain conditions. The fundamental problem in institutional analysis can be expressed like this: is it absurd to think that social groups can overcome the contradiction between a process of *production* that reinforces the mechanisms of group alienation, and a process of *bringing to light* the conscious subject that knows and the unconscious subject, this latter being a process that gradually dispels more and more of the phantasies that cause people to turn to God, to science or to any other supposed source of knowledge? In other words, can the group at once pursue its economic and social objectives while allowing individuals to maintain their own access to desire and some understanding of their own destiny? Or, better still: can the group face the problem of its own death? Can a group with a historic mission envisage the end of that mission – can the State envisage the withering away of the State? Can revolutionary parties envisage the end of their so-called mission to lead the masses?

This leads me to stress the distinction between group phantasy as it relates to dependent groups, and the transitional phantasy of independent subject groups. There is a kind of phantasizing that appears in static societies in the form of myths, and in bureaucratized societies in the form of roles, which produces the most wonderful narratives: 'When I'm twenty-five I'll be an officer; then a colonel and later on a general; I'll get a medal when I retire; then I'll die . . .' But group phantasizing is something more than this, because it includes an additional reference point that is not centred on a particular object, or on the individual's particular place in the social scale: 'I've been in the French army for a long time; the French army has always existed, it is eternal, so if I keep my place in the hierarchy, I too shall have something of the eternal. This makes life easier when I'm frightened of dying, or when my wife calls me a fool. After all, I *am* a regimental sergeant major!' The institutional object underlying the phantasy of military rank ('I'm not nobody') serves to unfurl a range of references of a homosexual nature that provides society with a blind and relatively homogeneous body of people who shrink from any self-questioning about life and death, and who are ready to enforce any repression, to torture, to bombard civilian populations with napalm and so on. The continuation in time of the institution at the level of phantasy is thus a kind of implicit support for the denial of the reality of death at the individual level. The capitalist controlling several trusts also draws support from this 'sense of eternity'. In his position at the top of the hierarchy,

he fulfils a kind of priestly function for those below, ritualizing eternity and conjuring away death. He is the servant of God/Capital. Faced with pain and afraid of desire, the individual clings to his job, his role in the family and the other functions that provide alienating phantasy supports. In the dependent group, phantasy masks the central truths of existence, but none the less, via the dialectic of signifiers, part objects, and the way these intersect with the sequences of history, it keeps in being the possibility of an emergence of the truth.

Would a group whose phantasy functions were working well produce the transitional phantasies of a subject group? At La Borde, for instance, when a group feels that it is getting somewhere, that it is achieving something, the most thankless tasks take on a quite different meaning, even such tedious jobs as taking up paving stones or working on an assembly-line. At such a moment, people's positions in relation to one another, their individual characteristics, their peculiar style, their way of speaking and so on, all take on a new meaning; you feel that you know people better and take more interest in them. In a psychiatric ward where an analytic process aiming to produce such an effect is successfully established – though it never survives for long – everything inhibiting or threatening in the differentiation of roles can be done away with: everyone becomes 'one of us' though that includes the whole particularist folk-memory that that phrase implies. Absurd though such folklorism may seem, it does not prevent the 'sense of belonging' from being effective. It is a fact that if a boy is to learn to read or to stop wetting his trousers, he must be recognized as being 'at home', being 'one of us'. If he crosses that threshold and becomes re-territorialized, his problems are no longer posed in terms of phantasy; he becomes himself again in the group, and manages to rid himself of the question that had haunted him: 'When shall I get to be *there*, to be part of *that*, to be "one of them"?' As long as he fails in that, his compulsive pursuit of that goal prevents his doing anything else at all.

This getting to the limits of the imagination seems to me to be the fundamental problem of setting up any management body that is not to be technocratic, any mass participation body for whatever purpose that is not to be unhealthily rationalist. It is not a matter of an independent category: if these phantasizing formations are not explored analytically, they operate as death-dealing impulses. From the point when I set out to enjoy my membership of the Bowls Club, I can say that I am dead, in the sense of the death inherent in the eternity of Bowls Clubs. On the other hand, if a group lets me short-circuit its action with a problematic that is open to revolution, even if that group assures me that revolution will certainly not save my life, or provide any solution to certain sorts of problem, but that its role is, in a sense, precisely to prevent my being in too much of a hurry to run away from that

problematic, then, most assuredly, the transitional phantasy formations of that group will enable me to make progress.

The demand for revolution is not essentially or exclusively at the level of consumer goods; it is directed equally to taking account of desire. Revolutionary theory, to the extent that it keeps its demands solely at the level of increasing people's means of consumption, indirectly reinforces an attitude of passivity on the part of the working class. A communist society must be designed not with reference to consumption, but to the desire and the goals of mankind. The philosophic rationalism that dominates all the expressions of the workers' movement like a super-ego fosters the resurgence of the old myths of paradise in another world, and the promise of a narcissistic fusion with the absolute. Communist parties are by way of having scientific 'knowledge' of how to create a form of organization that would satisfy the basic needs of all individuals. What a false claim! There can be social planning in terms of organizing production – though there still remain a lot of unanswered questions – but it cannot claim to be able to give *a priori* answers in terms of the desire objectives of individuals and subject groups.

All of which is just to say yet again that the ways to truth are, and will continue to be, an individual matter. I realize that what I am saying here can be interpreted as an appeal to 'respect human values' and other nonsense of that kind. Such interpretations are convenient, because they spare one the necessity of seeking further for an answer to the problem. I can hear some people saying, 'There's a man who hasn't got over his experience of the Communist Party and of the groupuscules'<sup>15</sup> he's been in. But all he had to do was stop going!' Braving ridicule, however, I persist in declaring that what is at issue is quite different. It is, first of all, at the core of the revolutionary struggles themselves – not the war of words, but the real struggle being waged by guerrillas and others. Either we fall into post-Stalinist thinking and come to grief, or we find another way and survive.

There are a lot of other things too – far more serious than wondering whether one can work out some compromise between the bureaucrat of the department and desire. Either the revolutionary workers' movement and the masses will recover their speech via *collective agents of utterance* that will guarantee that they are not caught up again in anti-production relations (as far as a work of analysis can be a guarantee), or matters will go from bad to worse. It is obvious that the bourgeoisie of present-day neo-capitalism are not neo-bourgeoisie and are not going to become one: they are undoubtedly the stupidest that history has ever produced. They will not find an effective way out. They will keep trying to cobble things together, but always too late and

<sup>15</sup> 'Groupuscules' designate the ensemble of little groups found on the left of the French Communist Party in the period leading up to 1968, a pejorative connotation of the Party establishment but later assumed by the groups themselves.

irrelevantly, as with all their great projects to help what their experts coyly describe as the 'developing countries'.

It is quite simple, then. Unless there is some drastic change, things are undoubtedly going to go very badly indeed, and in proportion as the cracks are a thousand times deeper than those that riddled the structure before 1939, we shall have to undergo fascisms a thousand times more frightful.

## Anti-Psychiatry and Anti-Psychoanalysis<sup>1</sup>

JEAN-JACQUES BROCHIER: How did you personally get involved in what we may call 'the anti-psychiatry business'?

FÉLIX GUATTARI: Well, first of all, Basaglia and Jervis came to La Borde in '65 or '66, and had some articles published in the review *Recherches*. Then there arose not so much a difference of ideas as a difference of style. They were not remotely interested in our experiments to reform institutional psychotherapy. The situation in Italy was already quite different, and their ideas were far more revolutionary. Then there was the English strain, with Laing and Cooper, who were also published in *Recherches*. They came to study days organized by Maud Mannoni and *Recherches* on the theme of 'alienated childhood'. Their break-away from ordinary institutions had very little in common either with ours at La Borde, or with Maud Mannoni or with Lacan. Later on, these differences of style came to reveal more profound divergences. I myself have also changed a great deal since that period.

J.-J. B.: Just what is anti-psychiatry?

F.G.: Primarily a literary phenomenon, taken up by the mass media. It developed from those two centres in England and Italy, but its appearance revealed the fact that there was considerable public interest in such problems, in the context of the 'new culture' that was coming into existence. But it must be admitted that, up to now, all that has been written, or said, or done in France has involved only a few nurses who were unhappy with the existing situation and a few dozen psychiatrists: the real interest in anti-psychiatry has been among the general public.

Today, one of the 'inventors' of anti-psychiatry, Laing, is no longer connected with it; he says he has never used the term. Basaglia believes it is a mystification that must be exposed. Meanwhile, in France, it has become something of a literary and cinematic genre. People earn a lot of money publishing little books with titles like 'Never Again Will I Be a Psychiatrist', 'Never Again Will I Be a Nurse', 'Never Again Will I Be Mad'. Groupuscules have formed in its wake, like Poulidor.

1. Some views elicited by Jean-Jacques Brochier and published in *Le Magazine Littéraire*, a special number entitled 'Le Mouvement des idées de Mai 1968', May 1976.