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Organizing indiscipline: maquis through the institution

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> 'In August, 1987, a diverse group of people – psychiatrists, psychologists, researchers, and directors of the Direction des Affaires Sanitaires et Sociales, from Lower Normandy, the area of Lyon, Geneva, and Trieste – met together in the small village of Granges-sur-Lot, in south-east France, where François Tosquelles currently lives, and remained to speak with him for three days in his house. The decision to undertake this journey had evolved during previous encounters between workers from Caen and Trieste: the idea was to return to the origins of a process of transformations in mental institutions which, in France, in the '40's, had taken its departure from the psychiatric hospital of St. Alban in the Lozère and which – having become a movement of national importance in the beginning of the '50's – subsequently became to be called *psychothérapie institutionelle*.'
> - "The School of Freedom", Interview with François Tosquelles[1]

The encounter depicted in the epigraph, transcribed as a witty written conversation in which Tosquelles is master of ceremonies, resumed a dialogue between Trieste and the French movement

that had been interrupted years before in the 1970s. The tension leading to the breaking off had been twofold. On the Trieste side, there were criticisms of the French decision to renounce the political battle over the 'sector' without attempting to substitute the system of national psychiatric hospitals with alternative institutional experiments, or to undo the separation of care from urban life. On the French side, the Basaglian movement in Trieste was seen as excessively focused on deinstitutionalization, failing to support the micro-political strategies of deviance[2] and political critique expressed in *symptoms*.

This was a complex tension, but above all it was one affected by the political processes of the era—by the strength and crisis of the French '68 movement, by the impetuosity and complexity of the Italian '77 movement, by the social, institutional, cultural, and political configurations of the different contexts and their difficult translations. The clashes that occurred in the 1970s were decidedly strong because concrete radical practices, and the everyday lives of those implicated, were at stake.

In the 1980s, a decade which Félix Guattari has called the winter years, movement trajectories once again became intertwined with greater strength and wider mutual recognition. This took place in multiple ways: through the trajectories of social cooperatives, to which Guattari devotes attention in his book *Chaosophy*,[3] in the "Letter for Europe of Leros" by Franco Rotelli, Guattari, and others,[4] in the multiple alliances that reanimated the "Reseau of Alternatives to Psychiatry" in the 1980s,[5] and, significantly, in the 1987 meeting of the Trieste group in Granges-sur-Lot, when Maurizio Costantino, who would later become a protagonist of the experience of Leros in Greece, and Giovanna Gallio, a prominent intellectual of the Basaglian movement, went in search of François Tosquelles (born Francesc in Catalonia) in order to reconstruct a

history, but above all in order to pose concrete questions from their experience in Trieste, which at the end of the 1980s reached a significant crisis of maturity.

After years of dismantling of the asylum, the Basaglia Law (180/1978, unique in Europe)[6] closed asylums in Italy and made the political nature of the relationship of power inherent to the psychiatric relationship explicit, including at a juridical level. Once the urban setting of mental health services developed; once psychiatric hospital admission and psychiatric wards in general hospitals were closed as last bastions of institutionalization; once the process of privatizing internment in closed clinics was ended; once the circuit of laboratories and cooperatives became established as an active, porous, and inclusive 'meta-phery' for care, one question remained: How could this critical praxis be brought into conversation with its own genealogy? Reading and commenting on the transcription of the "School of Freedom" dialogue, it can be said that between Saint-Alban and Trieste, contrasts were the offspring of proximity and differences never resulted in definitive divergences.

> 'The text presented here is not exactly an interview, though indeed many questions were presented by us to Tosquelles. The words, more than ever, were directed to the listener, not the reader. In the transcribing, the translating, and editing of the text we have sought as much as possible not to purify and dissipate the "grain of the voice", in that ritual of "mortuary dressing" of the spoken to the written word which - as Barthes says - sacrifices the tactics and expositions, the innocence and dangers inherent in speech. Despite the cuts, the partitioning of discussion topics and the censoring of references which were too personal, the text preserves and transmits - or so we believe and thanks also to the

> extraordinary power of Tosquelles - all of the positions (not separate but circular) which each participant assumed in the speaking and listening of this encounter. We might say, therefore, that it is a long story told aloud: it is the authority of an experience enclosed within a story which we went to seek out.'[7]

One can enumerate some points of contrast between the Trieste practice and that of Saint-Alban, but it is important to stress what the voices speaking from those experiences have in common. First, the centrality of the institutional object: in Saint-Alban it is the space of the institution that is the site of experimentation; in Trieste the focus of the work is on emptying the institution and building a relationship outside—entering the outside world where therapeutic practice had never been. On the one hand, we have the time of *maquis*,[8] the rural space, the France of the Second World War, and before that, the Spain of the Spanish Civil War. On the other hand, the proletarian urban territory of 1968, the Italian autonomous movements of the 1970s, the political crises of the 1980s.

There are other commonalities, one above all: anti-fascist practice as an ethic for transforming the institution. For Tosquelles, this meant the long crossing through totalitarian regimes and total institutions, from civil war, to French internment camps, to the refuge for partisans fighting the Vichy regime. For Basaglia, it meant the need to continue an anti-fascist practice in a republican institutional context in which, locked up in asylums, the *matti* (lit.: "loonies," a reappropriated term) were still subject to the rules of the fascist regime.

There is also a strong proximity and continuity in the critical reading of the function of the state that informed each institution.

Tosquelles, in his customary style, launched a provocation: 'If it wasn't for the unfortunate fact that wars kill, it wouldn't be a bad idea to organize a couple of wars for every generation, because only in those conditions does one understand things which one wouldn't understand otherwise.'[9] Only in a state of civil war is it possible to invent new institutions. This reflection resonates with Franco Rotelli:

> 'When an earthquake occurs, or any catastrophe, after the first moment of panic, after the astonished or desperate wandering, the dawn arises in which all work, cooperate, equal, in solidarity, one man, the social body as a collective antibody. This lasts, scholars say, until the "rescues" arrive: the army, the prefects, etc. Gradually the cooperation, the equality ends, the institutions regain control: everyone does their own thing. Everyone finds their role homologated by the institution. Norms, contract, rights, reconstruct the path of separateness and the unequal.'[10]

It is the transversal, mobile, and incomplete character that most brings these experiences together: the affirmation of the need for an organisational nomadism of institutional forms, so that they do not crystallise, so that they continue to establish themselves in concrete processes. In 1980, shortly before his death, Franco Basaglia proposed that the Communist Party's *case del popolo* (People's Houses) should become places for the revolution of care, as territorial mental health centers open to the city. Tosquelles tells the story of how many years earlier, he wrote a letter to the Soviet leadership to say that in Catalonia, it would be the *peñas*, anti-authoritarian popular circles, that would take charge of the revolution, not the soviets. Such principles of nomadism, emancipation, conflictuality, and politics invade the psychiatric institution and continually shift "illness" from the person suffering

mentally to the sick institutions, that is, to the whole of social institutions.

Here, summoning those voices from 1987, I attempt to continue the pun, the *déconnage*, as a nomadic strategy that cripples speech, searches for misunderstandings, concatenates, associates, socializes. Like the *maquis in the institutions*, the commonplace found at the end of the conversation in Granges-Sur-Lot, voices disguise themselves, take charge, and move contradictions forward, in the attempt to escape the infernal alternative between inevitable catastrophe and authoritarian omnipotence as the only options to get through our fragile present.

Maquis

> 'The *maquis* is one of the main Mediterranean ecosystems. It is a shrub-like plant formation typically consisting of sclerophyllous species, i.e., with narrow, leathery, and glossy persistent leaves, with an average height varying from 50 cm to 4 metres: these formations often derive from the evergreen Mediterranean forest.'[11]

Let us therefore return to the anecdotes. To the words of Basaglia and Tosquelles and these stories that intermingle. It is practice and then fabulation that composes the theoretical corpus of these experiences, which develops, becomes sophisticated, and is capable of abstract social production, while always returning to the concrete.

At the internment camp, Tosquelles created a psychological service with two doors that allowed people to enter on one side and leave on the other[12]: But how many people escaped? And then, where did they go? For how long? Did they return? What kind of control

and intervention did the camp develop in the face of this institutional crisis? How did the small "service team"—the guitarist, the painter, and Tosquelles—react at that point? What about the institution? Were they repressed, governed, denounced? A thousand questions that only the anecdote can open up, but that we must approach the contradictions they arise, in order to use them to pursue answers about our present, and not just for archiving the past.

Or Basaglia, who recognises himself and his previous experience as an anti-fascist prisoner in the inmates of the loony bin. So that, to the nurse who asks him to approve the record of restraints imposed during the previous night, he replies *mi no firmo* (I don't sign), in Venetian dialect.[13] Assuming, without mediation, the political burden of his technical role. Taking the side, without impartiality, of the interned citizens deprived of their freedom. Assuming, through conflict, the responsibility of not delegating a custodial role to the nurses. And seeking a dialogue out of the *langue*, in common speech, in dialect. On that 16 November 1961, this institutional vacuum—the not-doing, the not-signing of the record of overnight restraints—did not *solve* any problem, but it did open many problems up, problems that persist to this day.

Tosquelles's antifascist history is more widely known, first in the trenches of the Spanish war, with the prostitutes, then in the internment camps of southern France, and then in Saint-Alban with the *maquis* who passed through the asylum opened during the Vichy regime.[14] For Trieste, a few details can be recalled here. In the 1970s, the 1948 anti-fascist constitution was not yet applied in an institution—the asylum—that remained concretely fascist. The city's struggle for deinstitutionalisation was first and foremost a struggle to involve in the coeval— problematic, capitalist, social-democratic, etc., but antifascist— social contract those who had

never been involved: the *matti* who were interned, and more generally, that part of society still governed as an object by total institutions. This movement was intertwined with social and revolutionary uprisings sweeping the world: relationships with the Chilean exiles of Pinochet and Latin America, with the Spaniards and Greeks of the European dictatorships, with anti-psychiatric organisations, with anti-colonial groups in Burkina Faso and other African contexts, with the Sandinistas, the autonomous groups, the movements moving in and out of the institutions until at least the mid-1980s.

Something similar had happened in the British case: the violence of the everyday disrupted the social order, exposing fractures, allowing breakthroughs. In the early 1940s, Maxwell Jones became the protagonist by inventing the therapeutic community at Northfield Military Hospital.[15] The Second World War had changed the patients, who were no longer the wretched lumpen-proletariat, but now heroes returning from the front. And the nurses too: no longer the salaried guards of the asylum, also lumpen-proletarians, but middle-class women who wanted to play a leading role in the general mobilization of the war. And so, for Maxwell Jones, the field of institutional organisation was radically transformed. Patients could no longer be denied as objects, nor could care agents be used as instruments of custody. Indiscipline broke, at least for a while, psychiatric power.

The question that unites these anecdotes is the following. How to become *maquis* in the institutions? And how to do so when the institutional space can protect those on the outside, as an anti-fascist practice giving asylum to the French partisans, but also as anti-Stalinist, as, for example, in the Spanish Civil War. Or, how to do so when the institution is denied and then reinvented to accompany people in urban life, as *comrades*, in the party, in the

tavern, in the struggles, as in Trieste after 1968 and in the middle of the 1970s turmoil. *Organizing indiscipline*. On this common theme, the people of Trieste and the French group participating in the conversation with Tosquelles in Granges-Sur-Lot finally understood each other. They found a point to cling to for dancing together.

Maquillage

> 'The practice of decorating the skin and other visible parts of the body to improve or enhance their appearance, using cosmetic products. By extension, the term also designates the cosmetics that are used, such as lipstick, eye shadow, powder, bronzer, diamonds, skin foundation, etc., with the support of various tools such as brushes and sponges. In the performing arts it is used to characterise actors as the character they will portray, exaggerating some feature, deforming the face or simply starting from something new, as well as to correct distortions produced by lighting.'[16]

In Tosquelles we can say that a strategy of *travisamento*—disguising the face—exists, whereby a certain queerness of the self is what constitutes the possibility of opening the asylum, as elsewhere. The asylum is opened by the crossing of radical otherness. The breaking-in of arts and politics allows the radical otherness of Saint-Alban. This otherness— the composition and mobility within an asylum opened up to social forces—makes it possible to develop a pedagogy for the institution. It makes it possible for the institution to mobilise its own knowledge, and other knowledges, and to become something different.

This institutional transformation is possible because the institution gives itself to the bush. It becomes imperceptible from above, from the "center", from Paris, because it is hidden, disguised. And, in this disguise, in this *maquillage*, the social space of the asylum is not only along the margin, periphery. With the risk of the *maquis* entering the institution, the alliance between the two is beyond the margin, is "meta-phery". And as such, the asylum is not only a space of expression, but “a school of freedom,” says Tosquelles.[17] It is a place where different subjective singularities can compose and sustain themselves *in a lasting way*. In this tension of Tosquelles' institutional pedagogy there is a great performative power: an expression of the historical, contingent force of the war, but also the prefigurative affirmation of the subaltern struggle of peasants, workers, and *matti* as protagonists of a new society. Yet, the people of Trieste ask Tosquelles, is this enough to transform the asylum into a school of freedom?

> 'Professor Diatkine, a world-renowned psychiatrist, a veteran in age and experience, who directs one of the most advanced institutions of European psychiatry in Paris (in the 13th arrondissement), tells me: If, as a psychiatrist, you enter a place and smell a stench mixed with smoke and urine, with your eyes closed, you can say "on est chez nous". We psychiatrists can say, "we are at home". And here we could already close the discussion on psychiatry and architecture. François Tosquelles, who has strongly contributed to the progress of psychiatry, starting from Saint-Alban, in the Lozère, still recently writes about the possibility – inside a psychiatric hospital, inside a psychiatric institution – of setting up what he calls a school of freedom, a place of emancipation. The illusion of post-war psychiatrists that the utopia of a place, of a psychiatric hospital as a place of emancipation, was

> possible, marks an important part of the progressive European psychiatric culture. On the other hand, the illusion that the new man can be born behind walls is the illusion that has run through all the experiences of real socialism for all these decades; that a new man can only be born behind walls by protecting himself from the rest of the world, is the illusion that from Cuba to elsewhere has run through many of the Jacobin bourgeoisie's utopias when they tried to imagine a radical change in the world. Today we are all poorer, but one thing we know by now: the new man is never born behind walls, only monsters are born behind walls.'[18]

The Trieste critique therefore moves on two different levels. It is a political critique, not a critique of the discipline (of *psychiatry*). On the one hand, the French movement is contested because it renounced a comprehensive change of the mental healthcare system, creating alternative rather than substitutive models, and doing so in the private sector. Secondly, because it does not counter the logic of the total institution, which separates diversity from the world, and mystifies—as in a *maquillage*—this separation in the meta-phery, which nevertheless remains a separate place: separated from social life.

Tosquelles criticized Trieste by stating that once the asylum is closed, the problem is not solved: the "outside" is not a solution. 'In contemporary social life [...] there is only the school of administrative alienation.'[19] People are returned to loneliness and misery and to the society that had excluded them in the first place. And so, the space of the asylum as a space for protection will always be necessary. Trieste, in the years of student revolts, workers' struggles, and anti-colonial uprisings, sought another paradigm in which therapeutic practice consisted in returning the contradiction locked up in the asylum to the social context that

produced it, taking political responsibility for this restitution, and locating technical practice within social contexts and struggles: as an active part in social change.

The pedagogy sweeping Trieste is the pedagogy of reality: the reality of class conflict, the infrastructural misery of the neighbourhoods, state violence, and patriarchy, but also the molecular revolutions of the 1970s. For these reasons—contingent, cultural, subjective—the Basaglian struggle assumes a symbolic and imaginary centrality in Italy. It is concrete and radical, it is institutional but it takes a side, and most importantly, it is a transversal struggle involving everybody—and it is *effective*. It was written on the Trieste walls in 1977, when the French activists and psychiatrists participated in the Reseau: 'The asylum, disguised, remains an asylum. An institution to be destroyed,' as documented in the mural papers of Ugo Guarino. And in 1978, the Trieste asylum was closed.

Maquila

> 'A *maquila* is a company that imports products without paying taxes, the product of which is marketed in the country of origin of the raw material. The term originated in Mexico. Most of these factories are located in Mexican cities along the US border, mainly Tijuana, Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, Reynosa, and Heroica Nogales. These companies must work under the maquila program, requiring all products to be returned to their country of origin. Maquiladora's capital is usually entirely foreign.'[20]

When one leaves the asylum, one gets into trouble. You also get suffering people into trouble, as Tosquelles warns. 'The phobia of

madness is a natural condition of the human species. Human groups are formed so as to exclude madness from their midst, and it is for this reason that this notion of therapeutic action in the community is [...] a utopia that should be handled with care, you see, if one doesn't act with caution, if this exit isn't adequately prepared [...]'.[21] From the Trieste perspective, the dilemma was never whether to get into trouble or avoid it. The problem was rather how to push the contradictions, how to stay in trouble.

> 'Once working in the city, in the proletarian neighborhoods where the mental health centers are, it is no longer we psychiatrists who know: it is the nurses who know, who understand the context of the people coming out of the asylum and going back into their neighborhoods. Supporting the power of people and nurses and building alliances in the city has been our real strategy.'

Franco Rotelli put it more or less like this when we were talking about the documents that people had brought to us—users, workers, volunteers, from the city, from wherever—at the Trieste documentation center in San Giovanni, forty years after the closure of the Psychiatric Hospital. For, once brought out of the asylum, the contradictions expressed in suffering became common knowledge and a social issue (and often a social struggle).

A long digression would be useful here, but perhaps a diagram helps to outline the problem that Trieste of the 1970s poses to the Saint-Alban experience of the 1940s. If the asylum is the ground zero of social exchange, the problem for Trieste was not how to create a "market" *inside* the asylum (open to those who want to enter), because outside it was not possible to guarantee "protection". For Trieste there is no *maquis* without bush, without forest. Freedom cannot be "taught" in the *gardens of* psychiatry

without ‘declining into a respectable asylum of grateful servants’[22]. Besides guaranteeing the right *di asilo* (to sanctuary) – outside the asylum, it is necessary to uphold the right to social exchange, where social exchange is always open, always uncertain. The right to be part of social exchange is not abstract: it is the right to be in the risk, even in the violence, of the *social* contract and the social struggles.

In the construction of the concrete machines that are the cooperatives of the 1980s, the exploitation and alienation of labor are an inherent part of the matter. At the same time, however, the cooperative, social, and productive dimensions of labor are also there. There is no mystification of labor, as per the justification of the absence of wages in ergotherapy, because “working is therapeutic.” Rather, it is the therapeutic practice that needs to be confronted with the *practically true*: the market, fatigue, but also invention, sociality, joy.

The invented institutions deny the total institution precisely by virtue of this non-totality, and therefore by their partiality: partial because they are *part* of a broader social exchange, of which they cannot decide, and partial because they take a side, because one can always decide which side one is on. The open circuits of care are therefore triggered by a collaboration of public services with social entrepreneurships, rooted in cooperativism, renewed by Trieste "cooperativist" agents: associations, groups, movements, artists. In this openness, however, since the 1980s, cooperatives have clashed and been unable—nowadays more than ever—to resolve contradictions: alienation, exploitation, and precarisation as concrete aspects of their work. And so, a simple question remains, which, however, is tremendously difficult to answer in the concrete: Can precarious, exploited, alienated work still be therapeutic? And, *stuck* with the trouble, can social cooperatives,

instead of being protected places, become social machines to cure contemporary society and welfare institutions?

Trying to answer these questions concretely means asking how power can be returned effectively to the most fragile people. Returning power not only as potency, but also as contradiction, as problem, as trouble. It is a matter of thinking about power not as a formal or moral problem, in a way that does not correspond to a kind of ideological split between "taking power" or "being possessed by power". The issue is rather to go back to reading the tensions of political society, the dynamics of government, the possibilities of an autonomy of the subalterns, and the mechanisms of dominance and hegemony in the current context.

To conclude these notes, therefore, three elements can be proposed that may prove important to address the issue in practical terms. First, what does it mean to think about the problem of power from the bottom up? To organize—materially, institutionally, and subjectively—subaltern forces that can be disruptive in the institutional field, as was the case with the *maquis* in Saint-Alban or the seizure of the city in Trieste. Second, how can power be used from above? Is it possible to *protect*? (As Tosquelles pointed out.)[23] To what extent can this *protection* allow the unseen that happens in the margins to have consequences on society as a whole? To transform society? And, finally and consequently, how can an autonomous, multiple, *constituent* power be renewed—one capable of inventing other worlds where power, like Prospero in Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*, feels cold?[24]

[1] Giovanna, Gallio, Maurizio Costantino, “The School of Freedom”, Interview with François Tosquelles, *Per la Salute Mentale / For Mental Health. Pratiche, ricerche, culture dell’innovazione / Practices, Research, Cultures in the Process of Innovation*, No 4, 1987, pp. 181-209, here p. 181.

[2] The term is used here in reference to the “deviant majority.” See Franco Basaglia, Franca Basaglia Onagro, *La maggioranza deviante* [*The deviant majority*], Turin: Einaudi, 1971.

[3] Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy. Texts and Interviews, 1972-1977*, New York: Zone Books, 1995, p. 199.

[4] In Leros and Athens, a team from Trieste worked for several years from the mid 1980s through the early 1990s to dismantle Greek asylums. In 1989, Félix Guattari participated in institutional and political mobilisations at both sites. Félix Guattari, *De Leros à La Borde*, Paris: L’édition d’une, 2012.

[5] The *Réseau alternative à la psychiatrie* consisted of a number of international gatherings in different European and Latin American cities, starting in Brussels, and was organised by Mony Elkaim from 1975 until the late 1980s.

[6] The law 180/1978 determined the closure of all psychiatric hospitals in Italy (and was applied in different ways according to each region), regulating procedures for obligatory treatments in environments that were not secluded, including in specific wards of general hospitals as well as through the development of community care services similar to those of the French *secteur*.

[7] Gallio/Costantino, “The School of Freedom”, p. 181.

[8] *Maquis* here refers to the partisan struggles against the Vichy regime in France during the Second World War, but it is used throughout the text as a pun.

[9] Gallio/Costantino, "The School of Freedom", p. 192.

[10] Franco Rotelli, "Su quella singolare che il plurale perseguire" *Rivista 'e'*, No. 2/3, August-October 1987. *Rivista 'e'* represented a brief but intense moment of remarkable elaboration with contributions of poets and theorists including Andrea Zanzotto, Franco Fortini, Giuseppe Zigania, Tino Vaglieri and Giancarlo Majorino. Published for five issues in 'giant' format, *'e'* was transversal to apparently distinct areas of thought and interests, occupying the border between various disciplines. Republished in Franco Rotelli, *Quale psichiatria? Taccuino e lezioni*, Trento: Alphabeta, 2022.

[11] From https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maquia

[12] Gallio/Costantino, "The School of Freedom", p. 186.

[13] See Giovanna Del Giudice, …*E tu slegalo subito. Sulla contenzione in psichiatria*, Trento: Alphabeta, 2020.

[14] Carles Guerra, Joana Masó, *Tosquelles: Com una màquina de cosir en un camp de blat*, Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2022.

[15] Craig Fees, David Kennard, 'Classic Text No. 133: 'Maxwell Jones and the Therapeutic Community', by David Millard (1996)', *History of psychiatry* 34:1, 2023, pp. 78-86.

[16] From https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maquillaje

[17] Gallio/Costantino, "The School of Freedom", p. 186.

[18] Franco Rotelli, 'Dietro le mura nascono i mostri', Keyote at the congress "Psichiatria e architettura", Mendrisio, Canton Ticino, 5-6 November 1992, published in *La Nuova Libera Stampa*, Lugano, 14 November, 1992. Republished in Rotelli, *Quale psichiatria?*.

[19] Gallio/Costantino, "The School of Freedom", p. 186.

[20] From https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maquiladora

[21] Gallio/Costantino, "The School of Freedom", p. 187.

[22] Franco Basaglia, *L'utopia della realtà (raccolta di saggi scritti tra il 1963 e il 1979)*, Turin: Einaudi, 1979, p. 63.

[23] Gallio/Costantino, "The School of Freedom", p. 205.

[24] Aimé Césaire, Richard Miller, William Shakespeare, *A tempest: based on Shakespeare's The tempest, adaptation for a Black theatre*, London: Bloomsbury, 1986.