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<nettime> Remaking Social Practices

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Remaking Social Practices (1)

by Felix Guattari

The routines of daily life, and the banality of the world represented to us by the media, surround us with a reassuring atmosphere in which nothing is any longer of real consequence. We cover our eyes; we forbid ourselves to think about the turbulent passage of our times, which swiftly thrusts far behind us our familiar past, which effaces ways of being and living that are still fresh in our minds, and which slaps our future onto an opaque horizon, heavy with thick clouds and miasmas. We depend all the more on the reassurance that nothing is assured. The two "superpowers" of yesterday, for so long buttressed against each other, have been destabilized by the disintegration of one among them. The countries of the former USSR and Eastern Europe have been drawn into a drama with no apparent outcome. The United States, for its part, has not been spared the violent upheavals of civilization, as we saw in Los Angeles. Third World countries have not been able to shake off paralysis; Africa, in particular, finds itself at an atrocious impasse. Ecological disasters, famine, unemployment, the escalation of racism and xenophobia, hunt, like so many threats, the end of this millennium. At the same time, science and technology have evolved with extreme rapidity, supplying man with virtually all the necessary means to solve his material problems. But humanity has not seized upon these; it remains stupefied, powerless before the challenges that confront it. It passively contributes to the pollution of water and the air, to the destruction of forests, to the disturbance of climates, to the disappearance of a multitude of living species, to the impoverishment of the genetic capital of the biosphere, to the destruction of natural landscapes, to the suffocation of its cities, and to the progressive abandonment of cultural values and moral references in the areas of human solidarity and fraternity ... Humanity seems to have lost its head, or more precisely, its head is no longer functioning with its body. How can it find a compass by which to reorient itself within a modernity whose complexity overwhelms it?

To think through this complexity, to renounce, in particular, the reductive approach of scientism when a questioning of its prejudices and short-term interests is required: such is the necessary perspective for entry into an era that I have qualified as "post-media", as all great contemporary upheavals, positive or negative, are currently judged on the basis of information filtered through the massmedia industry, which retains only a description of events [le petit cote evenementiel] and never problematizes what is at stake, in its full amplitude.

It is true that it is difficult to bring individuals out of themselves, to disengage themselves from their immediate preoccupations, in order to reflect on the present and the future of the world. They lack collective incitements to do so. Most older methods of communication, reflection and dialogue have dissolved in favor of an individualism and a solitude that are often synonymous with anxiety and neurosis. It is for this reason, that I advocate - under the aegis of a new conjunction of environmental ecology, social ecology and mental ecology - the invention of new collective assemblages of enunciation concerning the couple, the family, the school, the neighborhood, etc.

The functioning of current *mass media*, and television in particular, runs counter to such a perspective. The tele-spectator remains passive in front of a screen, prisoner of quasi-hypnotic relation, cut off from the other, stripped of any awareness of responsibility.

Nevertheless, this situation is not made to last indefinitely. Technological evolution will introduce new possibilities for interaction between the medium and its user, and between users themselves. The junction of the audiovisual screen, the telematic screen and the computer screen could lead to a real reactivation of a collective sensibility and intelligence. The current equation (media=passivity) will perhaps disappear more quickly than one would think. Obviously, we cannot expect a miracle from these technologies: it will all depend, ultimately, on the capacity of groups of people to take hold of them, and apply them to appropriate ends.

The constitution of large economic markets and homogeneous political spaces, as Europe and the West are tending to become, will

likewise have an impact on our vision of the world. But these factors tend in opposite directions, such that their outcome will depend on the evolution of the power relations between social groups, which, we must recognize, remain undefined. As industrial and economic antagonism between the United States, Japan, and Europe is accentuated, the decrease in production costs, the development of productivity and the conquering of "market shares" will become increasingly high stakes, increasing structural unemployment and leading to an always more pronounced social "dualization" within capitalist citadels. This is not to mention their break with the Third World, which will take a more and more conflictual and dramatic turn, as a result of population growth.

On the other hand, the reinforcement of these large axes of power will undoubtedly contribute to the institution of a regulation - if not of a "planetary order" - then of a geopolitical and ecological nature. By favoring large concentrations of resources on research objectives or on ecological and humanitarian programs, the presence of these axes could play a determining role in the future of humanity. But it would be, at the same time, immoral and unrealistic to accept that the current, quasi-Manichaean duality between rich and poor, weak and strong, would increase indefinitely. It was unfortunately from this perspective that, undoubtedly in spite of themselves, the signatories to the so-called Heidelberg Appeal presented at the Rio conference were committed to the suggestion that the fundamental choices of humanity in the area of ecology be left to the initiatives of scientific elites (see, in **Le Monde Diplomatique**, the editorial by Ignacio Ramonet, July of 1992, and the article by Jean-Marc Levy-Leblond, August 1992). This proceeds from an unbelievable scientific myopia. How, in effect, can one not see that an essential part of the ecological stakes of the planet arises from this break in collective subjectivity between the rich and poor? The scientists are to find their place within a new international democracy that they themselves must promote. And this is not to foster the myth of their omnipotence that advances them along this path!

How could we reconnect the head to the body, how could we join science and technology with human values? How could we agree upon common projects while respecting the singularity of individual positions? By what means, in the current climate of passivity, could we unleash a mass awakening, a new renaissance? Will fear of catastrophe be sufficient provocation? Ecological accidents, such as Chernobyl, have certainly led to a rousing of opinion. But it is not just a matter of brandishing threats; it is necessary to move toward practical achievements. It is also necessary to recall that danger can itself exert a power of fascination. The presentiment of catastrophe can release an unconscious desire for catastrophe a longing for nothingness, a drive to abolish. It was thus that the German masses in the Nazi epoch lived in the grip of a fantasy of the end of the world associated with a mythic redemption of humanity. Emphasis must be placed, above all, on the reconstruction of a collective dialogue capable of producing innovative practices. Without a change in mentalities, without entry into a post-media era, there can be no enduring hold over the environment. Yet, without modifications to the social and material environment, there can be no change in mentalities. Here, we are in the presence of a circle that leads me to postulate the necessity of founding an "ecosophy" that would link environmental ecology to social ecology and to mental ecology.

From this ecosophic perspective, there would be no question of reconstituting a hegemonic ideology, as were the major religions or Marxism. It is absurd, for example, for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to advocate the generalization of a unique model of growth in the Third World. Africa, Latin America, and Asia must be able to embark on specific social and cultural paths of development.

The world market does not have to lead the production of each group of people in the name of a notion of universal growth. Capitalist growth remains purely quantitative, while a complex development would essentially concern the qualitative. It is neither the preeminence of the State (in the manner of bureaucratic socialism), nor that of the world market (under the aegis of neo-liberal ideologies), that must dictate the future of human activities and their essential objectives. It is thus necessary to establish a planetary dialogue and to promote a new ethic of difference that substitutes for current capitalist powers a politics based on the desires of peoples. But wouldn't such an approach lead to a chaos, as the current crisis demonstrates. On the whole, democratic chaos is better than the Chao is that results from authoritarianism!

The individual and the group cannot avoid a certain existential plunge into chaos. This is already what we do each night when we abandon ourselves to the world of dreams. The main question is to know what we gain from this plunge: a sense of disaster, or the revelation of new outlines of the possible? Who is controlling the capitalist chaos today? The stock market, multinationals, and, to a lesser extent, the powers of the state! For the most part, decerebrated organizations! The existence of a world market is certainly indispensable for the structuring of international economic relations. But we cannot expect this market to miraculously regulate human exchange on this planet. The real estate market contributes to the disorder of our cities. The art market perverts aesthetic creation. It is thus of primordial importance that, alongside the capitalist market, there appear territorialized markets that rely on the support of substantial formations, that affirm their modes of valorization. Out of the capitalist chaos must come what I call "attractors" of values: values that are diverse, heterogeneous, dissensual [dissensuelle].

Marxists based historical movement on a necessary dialectical progression of the class struggle. Liberal economists blindly placed their trust in the free play of the market to resolve tensions and disparities,

and to bring about the best of worlds. And yet events confirm, if that were necessary, that progress is neither mechanically nor dialectically related to the class struggle, to the development of science and technology, to economic growth, or to the free play of the market Growth is not synonymous with progress, as the barbaric resurgence of social and urban confrontations, inter-ethnic conflicts and world-wide economic tensions cruelly reveals.

Social and moral progress is inseparable from the collective and individual practices that advance it. Nazism and fascism were not transitory maladies, the accidents of history, thereafter overcome. They constitute potentialities that are always present; they continue to inhabit our universe of virtuality; the Stalinism of the Gulag, Maoist despotism, can reappear tomorrow in new contexts. In various forms, a microfascism proliferates in our societies, manifested in racism, xenophobia, the rise of religious fundamentalisms, militarism, and the oppression of women. History does not guarantee the irreversible crossing of "progressive thresholds". Only human practices, a collective voluntarism, can guard us against falling into worse barbarities. In this respect, it would be altogether illusory to leave it up to formal imperatives for the defense of the "rights of man" or "rights of peoples". Rights are not guaranteed by a divine authority; they depend on the vitality of the institutions and power formations that sustain their existence.

An essential condition for succeeding in the promotion of a new planetary consciousness would thus reside in our collective capacity for the recreation of value systems that would escape the moral, psychological and social lamination of capitalist valorization, which is only centered on economic profit. The joy of living, solidarity, and compassion with regard to others, are sentiments that are about to disappear and that must be protected, enlivened, and propelled in new directions. Ethical and aesthetic values do not arise from imperatives and transcendent codes. They call for an existential participation based on an immanence that must be endlessly reconquered. How do we create or expand upon such a universe of values? Certainly by not dispensing with moral lessons.

The suggestive power of the theory of information has contributed to masking the importance of the enunciative dimensions of communication. It leads us to forget that a message must be received, and not just transmitted, in order to have meaning. Information cannot be reduced to its objective manifestations; it is, essentially, the production of subjectivity, the becoming-consistent [prise de consistance] of incorporeal universes. These last aspects cannot be reduced to an analysis in terms of improbability and calculated on the basis of binary choices. The truth of information refers to an existential event occurring in those who receive it. Its register is not that of the exactitude of facts, but that of the significance of a problem, of the consistency of a universe of values. The current crisis of the media and the opening up of a post-media era are the symptoms of a much more profound crisis.

What I want to emphasize is the fundamentally pluralist, multi-centered, and heterogeneous character of contemporary subjectivity, in spite of the homogenization it is subjected to by the mass media. In this respect, an individual is already a "collective" of heterogeneous components. A subjective phenomenon refers to personal territories - the body, the self - but also, at the same time, to collective territories - the family, the community, the ethnic group. And to what must be added all the procedures for subjectivation embodied in speech, writing, computing, and technological machines.

In pre-capitalist societies, initiation into the things of life and the mysteries of the world were transmitted through relations of family, peer-group, of clan, guild, ritual, etc. This type of direct exchange between individuals has tended to become rare. Subjectivity is forged through multiple mediations, whereas individuals has tended to become rare. Subjectivity is forged through multiple mediations, whereas individual relations between generations, sexes, and proximal groups have weakened. For example, the role of grandparents as an intergenerational memory support for children has very often disappeared. The child develops in a context shadowed by television, computer games, telecommunications, comic strips. ... A new machinic solitude is being born, which is certainly not without merit, but which deserves to be continually reworked such that it can accord with renewed forms of sociality. Rather than relations of opposition, it is a matter of forging polyphonic interlacings between the individual and the social. Thus, a subjective music remains to be thereby composed.

The new planetary consciousness will have to rethink machinism. We frequently continue to oppose the machine to the human spirit. Certain philosophies hold that modern technology has blocked access to our ontological foundations, to primordial being. And what if, on the contrary, a revival of spirit and human values could be attendant upon a new alliance with machines?

Biologists now associate life with new approach to machinism concerning the cell, and the organs of the living body; linguists, mathematicians, and sociologists explore other modalities of machinism. In thus enlarging the concept of the machine, we are led to emphasize certain of its aspects that have been insufficiently explored to date. Machines are not totalities enclosed upon themselves. They maintain determined relations with a spatio-temporal exteriority, as well as with universes of signs and field of virtuality. The relation between the inside and the outside of a machinic system is not only the result of a consummation of energy, of the production of an object: it is equally manifested through genetic phylums. (2) A machine rises to the surface of the present like the completion of a past lineage, and it is the point of restarting a rupture, from which an evolutionary lineage will spread to the future. The

emergence of these genealogies and fields of alterity is complex. It is continually worked over by all the creative forces of the sciences, the arts, social innovations, which become entangled and constitute a mecosphere surrounding our biosphere - not as a constraining yoke of an exterior armor, but as an abstract, machinic efflorescence, exploring the future of humanity.

Human life is taken up, for example, in a race with the AIDS retrovirus. Biological sciences and medical technology will win the battle with this illness or, in the end, the human species will be eliminated. Similarly, intelligence and sensibility have undergone a total mutation as a result of new computer technology, which has increasingly insinuated itself into the motivating forces of sensibility, acts, and intelligence. We are currently witnessing a mutation of subjectivity that perhaps surpasses the invention of writing, or the printing press, in importance.

Humanity must undertake a marriage of reason and sentiment with the multiple off-shoots of machinism, or else it risks sinking into chaos. A renewal of democracy could have, as an objective, a pluralist management of its machinic components. In this way, the judiciary and the legislature will be brought to forge new ties with the world of technology and of research (this is already the case with commissions on ethics investigating problems in biology and contemporary medicine; but we must also rapidly create commissions for the ethics of the media, of urbanism, of education). It is necessary, in sum, to delineate again the real existential entities of our epoch, which no longer correspond to those of still only a few decades ago. The individual, the social, and the machinic all overlap - as do the juridical, the ethical, the aesthetic, and the political. A major shift in objectives is in progress: values such as the resingularization of existence, ecological responsibility, and machinic creativity are called upon to install themselves as the center of a new progressive polarity in place of the old left-right dichotomy.

The production machines at the basis of the world economy are aligned uniquely with so called leading industries. They do not take account of other sectors which fall by the wayside because they do not generate capitalist profits. Machinic democracy will have to undertake a re-balancing of current systems of valorization. To produce a city that is clean, livable, lively, rich in social interactions; to develop a humane and effective medicine (B2C and an enriching education, are objectives that are equally worthwhile as a production-line of automobiles, or high-performance electronic equipment.

Current machines - technological, scientific, social - are potentially capable of feeding, clothing, transporting and educating all humans: the means are there, within reach, to support life for ten billion inhabitants on this planet. It is the motivating systems for producing the goods and distributing them fairly that are inadequate. To be engaged in developing material and moral well-being, in social and mental ecology, should be every bit as valued as working in leading sectors or in financial speculation.

It is the nature of work that has changed, as a result of the ever increasing prevalence of immaterial aspects in its composition: knowledge, desire, aesthetic taste, ecological preoccupations. The physical and mental activity of man finds itself in increasing adjacency to technical, computer and communication devices. In this, the old Fordist or Taylorist conceptions of the organization of industrial sites and of ergonomics have been superseded. In the future, it will be more and more necessary to appeal to individual and collective initiative, at all stages of production and distribution (and even of consumption). The constitution of a new landscape of collective assemblages of work - particularly robotics - will call into question old hierarchical structures and, as a consequence, call for a revision of current salarial norms.

Consider the agricultural crisis in developed countries. It is legitimate that agricultural markets open themselves up to the Third World, where climatic conditions and productivity are often much more favorable for production than countries situated more to the north. But does this mean that American, European and Japanese farmers must abandon the countryside and migrate to the cities? On the contrary, it is necessary to redefine agriculture and animal farming in these countries, in order to adequately valorize their ecological aspects and to preserve the environment. Forests, mountains, rivers, coast-lines - all constitute a non-capitalist capital, a qualitative investment, that should be made to yield a return, and must be continually re-valorized, which implies, in particular, a radical rethinking of the position of the farmer and the fisherman.

The same goes for domestic labor: it will be necessary for the women and men who are responsible for the raising of children - a task which continues to become more complex - to be appropriately remunerated. In a general way, a number of "private" activities would thereby be called upon to take their place in a new system of economic valorization that would take into account the diversity and heterogeneity of human activities that are socially, aesthetically, or ethically useful.

To permit an enlargement of the wage-earning class to include the multitude of social activities that deserve to be valorized, economists will perhaps have to imagine a renewal of current monetary systems and wage systems. The coexistence, for example, of strong currencies, open to the high seas of global economic competition, with protected currencies that are unconvertible and territorialized over a given social space, would allow for the alleviation of extreme misery, by distributing the goods that arise exclusively from an internal market and allowing a wide range of social activities to proliferate - activities which would thereby lose their apparently marginal character.

Such a revision of the division and valorization of labor does not

necessarily imply an indefinite diminution of the work-week, or an advancing of the retirement age. Certainly, machinism tends to liberate more and more "freetime". But free for what? To devote oneself to prefabricate leisure activities? To stay glued to the television? How many retirees would sink, after some months of their new situation, into despair and depression, from their inactivity? Paradoxically, an ecosophic redefinition of labor could go together with an increase in the duration of wage-earning. This would imply a skillful separation of working time allotted for the economic market and such time relating to an economy of social and mental values. One could imagine, for example, modulated retirements that would allow the workers, employees and managers who desire it to not be cut off from the activities of their companies, especially those with social and cultural implications. Is it not absurd that they are abruptly rejected at precisely the moment when they have the best knowledge of their field, and when they could be of most service in the areas of training and research? The perspective of such a social and cultural recomposition of labor would lead naturally to the promotion of a new transversality between productive assemblages and the rest of the community.

Certain union experiments are already moving in this direction. In Chile, for example, there exist new union practices that are joined organically with their social environment. The militants of "territorial unionization" are not only preoccupied with the defense of unionized workers, but also with the difficulties encountered by the unemployed, by women, and by the children of the neighborhood where the company is located. They participate in the organization of educational and cultural programs, and involve themselves in the problems of health, hygiene, ecology, and urbanism. (Such an enlargement of the field of worker competence and action is far from favorably regarded by the hierarchical forces of the union apparatus.) In this country, groups for the "ecology of retirement" devote themselves to the cultural and relational organization of the elderly.

It is difficult, and yet essential, to turn the page on old reference systems based on an oppositional split of left-right, socialist-capitalist, market economy- state planned economy. ... It is not a question of creating a "centrist" pole of reference, equidistant from the other two, but of disengaging from this type of system that is founded on a total adhesion, on a supposedly scientific foundation, or on transcendent juridical and ethical givens. Public opinion, before the political classes, has become allergic to programmatic speeches, to dogmas that are intolerant of diverse points of view. But while the public debate and the means of discussion have not acquired renewed forms of expression, there is a great risk that they will turn more and more away from the exercise of democracy, and toward either the passivity of abstention, or to the activism of reactionary factions. This means that in a political campaign, it is less a case of conquering massive public support for an idea, than of seeing public opinion structure itself into multiple and vital social segments. The reality is no longer one and indivisible. It is multiple, and marked by lines of possibility that human praxis can catch in flight. Alongside energy, information and new materials, the will to choose and to assume risk place themselves at the heart of new machinic undertakings, whether they be technological, social, theoretical or aesthetic.

The "ecosophic cartographies" that must be instituted will have, as their own particularity, that they will not only assume the dimensions of the present, but also those of the future. They will be as preoccupied by what human life on Earth will be in thirty years, as by what public transit will be in three years. They imply an assumption of responsibility for future generations, what philosopher Hans Jonas calls "an ethic of responsibility". (3) It is inevitable that choices for the long term will conflict with the choices of short-term interests. The social groups affected by such problems must be brought to reflect on them, to modify their habits and mental coordinates, to adopt new values and to post negotiate the present in the name of the future.

It is not, for all that, a question of falling back into totalitarian and authoritarian visions of history, messianisms which, in the name of "paradise" or of ecological equilibrium, would claim to rule over the life of each and everyone. Each "cartography" represents a particular vision of the world which, even when adopted by a large number of individuals, would always harbor an element of uncertainty at its heart. That is, in truth, its most precious capital; on its basis, an authentic hearing of the other could be established. A hearing of disparity, singularity, marginality, even of madness, does not arise only from the imperatives of tolerance and fraternity. It constitutes an essential preparation, a permanent appeal to this order of uncertainty, a stripping of forces of chaos that always haunt structures that are dominant, self-sufficient, and that believe in their own superiority. Such a hearing could overturn or restore direction to these structures, by recharging them with potentiality, by deploying, through them, new lines of creative flow.

In the midst of this state of affairs, a shaft of meaning must be discovered, that cuts through my impatience for the other to adopt my point of view, and through the lack of good will in the attempt to bend the other to my desired. Not only must I accept this adversity, I must love it for its own sake: I must seek it out, communicate with it, delve into it, increase it. It will get me out of my narcissism, my bureaucratic blindness, and will restore for me a sense of finitude that all the infantilizing subjectivity of the mass media attempts to conceal. Ecosophic democracy would not give itself up to the facility for consensual agreement: it will invest itself in a dissensual metamodelization. With it, responsibility emerges from the self in order

to pass to the other.

Without the promotion of such a subjectivity of difference, of the atypical, of utopia, our epoch could topple into atrocious conflicts of identity, like those the people of the former Yugoslavia are suffering. It would be vain to appeal to morality and respect for rights. Subjectivity disappears into the empty stakes of profit and power. Refusing the status of the current media, combined with a search for new social inter activities, for an institutional creativity and an enrichment of values, would already constitute an important step on the way to a remaking of social practices.

Notes

This article appeared under the title "Pour une refondation des pratiques sociales" in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Oct. 1992): 26-7

- (1) A few weeks before his sudden death on August 29, 1992, Felix Guattari sent us [*Le Monde Diplomatique*] the following text. With the additional weight conferred upon it by its author's tragic disappearance, this ambitious and all-encompassing series of reflection takes on, in some sense, the character of a philosophical will or testament.
- (2) The editors of *Le Monde Dip.* insert a note here on the definition of a phylum: it is the primitive stock from which a genealogical series issues.
- (3) Hans Jonas, *Le Principe responsabilite. Une ethique pour la civilization technologique*, trad. de l'allemand par Jean Greisch (Paris: Edition du Cerf, 1990). *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, trans. by H. Jonas and D. Herr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)

Translated by Sophie Thomas

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