

Aliénés de tous les pays, unissons-nous ! 2013-2014



Le drapeau des fous
En collaboration avec
Pech-Sherpa
Photo : Ivan Binet

Alienated of every country, unite!

A concept with a strong historic connotation, alienation is nevertheless a fiercely contemporary idea. To mental alienation – a psychic break between the “alienated” and the world – is added social alienation where the individual is often stripped of his own will, stripped even from the world.

The popularization of the term *alienation* in political philosophy since Karl Marx, among others, has contributed to its current polysemy and its multiple intersections. In the end, therefore, it is legitimate to ask if there are multiple forms of alienation or if, in fact, alienation is not a universal state of being applicable to all kinds of situations.

Are we all alienated? Or, at the very least, are we all individually alienated from someone? Are some forms of alienation more acceptable than others? And if yes, does this social acceptability make our alienation, which is sometimes voluntary, sometimes endured, more comfortable?

Does the value placed on work as a fundamental source in the construction of individual identity not encourage alienation? Does the voluntary attachment to a routine organized around the work/leisure polarity not engender individual alienating normalized social behaviours? What is the meaning of burn-out, a word often preferred over depression because it associates mental suffering with a super-human effort (therefore noble) in regards to work? Is the increasing medicalization of children with behavior disorders a result of an alienating school system, of alienating or alienated parents, or of children who are becoming alienated from a system that they do not fit into easily? How is our relationship with information technology both alienating and enriching? Is alienation at work less important than alienation at the asylum? Where does individual or collective alienation begin and end? On what basis do we judge ourselves and others as alienated beings, or as perhaps even alienating? Is the alienated today, with his diagnosis, medication and iPod, less alienated than in

the 1930s? Homeless, unemployed, non-existent in the public space, can we say, in our society that is especially fond of reasoning utilitarian reasoning, that the alienated are more useless than ever?

In a nod to Marx's call to the proletarians of all countries, the theme chosen by Folie/Culture proposes to unite the alienated from every country. Globalization oblige, the alienated from Cambodia or Tanzania suffer the use of Western psychiatry applied without any cultural discernment, while at the same time the alienated sweatshop worker in Bangladesh makes your next outdoor jacket; while the Dutch grow greenhouse peppers for the Italians, and the Italians prepare their tulip bulbs; mobile technologies invented in Western countries contribute to Arab social revolutions, while allowing us to speak almost as easily to a Mexican colleague as to our next door neighbor; and all countries competing for the tourist manna use the same tricks to hide the homeless, the alienated, and the exploited workers in order to demonstrate their bona fides to the generic tourist who is offered the same all-inclusive packages, the same charms as souvenirs, the same restaurants, and the same photographs. Perhaps the union of all the alienated from every country has already occurred, if only economically?

With this theme, Folie/Culture hopes to take the pulse of globalized madness through a reflection on new psychiatric, political, and cultural discourses on alienation on the one hand, and by proposing a panorama of the practical and contemporary forms of alienation, on the other. *Alienated of every country, unite!*

By Alain-Martin Richard
For the programming committee