INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT DE GAULEJAC

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ENTREVISTA COM VINCENT DE GAULEJAC

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Interviewer: Matheus Viana Braz & Guilherme Elias da Silva [4]

Interview conducted with Professor Ph.D. Vincent Gaulejac, on the occasion of his participation in the II Meeting of Subjectivity and Work Interinstutional Laboratory (Known in Brazil as Laboratório Interinstitucional de Subjetividade e Trabalho - LIST), II Symposium of Psychology and Work: Social Dimensions and Subjectivity, and VIII Meeting of Organizational and Work Psychology (EPOT), which took place in the city of Maringa, Parana/Brazil, between November 21st and 23rd, 2018.

Presentation: Vincent Gaulejac is a sociologist, an emeritus professor of Sociology at the University Paris-Diderot 7, a Doctor *Honoris Causa* by the University of Mons (Belgium). He is the author of about 20 books. He was a director of Social Change Laboratory from 1981 to 2014 in Paris. He is a president and founding member of the Clinical Sociology International Network (RISC), which includes participants from over 15 countries. His research works led him to explore The Organizations Power, The Class Neurosis, The Shame Origins, The Fight for Places, The Cost of Excellence, The Sick Management Society, or The Sources of Work Malaise and Paradoxical Capitalism. An engaged researcher, he is one of the founders of 'Convivialists Club', is part of *L'Appel des Appels*[5] and he actively participates in the prevention of violent radicalization programs.

LIST: Firstly, we would like to thank you for granting us this interview. Thank you. Now for starting, we would like to ask you to make a presentation of your career.
Gaulejac: I could make two presentations on my professional career. One in two minutes, formal, and another in which it would take all night long, about my family romance and my

social trajectory. There is, on my site[6] , a text called *Se autorizar a pensar*, in which I present my career, as I arrived at the Clinical Sociology and how I became a teacher and researcher. However, in short, I am currently an Emeritus Professor at the Université Paris-Diderot 7; I am the president of the Clinical Sociology International Network (RISC[7]), and I wrote some books that illustrate the Clinical Sociology approach (Gaulejac, Hanique, & Roche, 2012; Gaulejac, Giust-Desprairies, & Massa, 2013) in several different areas. For example, first in the areas of life stories (Gaulejac & Legrand, 2013), through analysis of conflicts related to social class changes - as in class neurosis (Gaulejac, 1987) - as well as by the shame issue (Gaulejac, 1996) and the weight of family heritage (Gaulejac, 1999). Second, in the work record (Gaulejac & Taboada-Leonetti, 1994; Gaulejac, 2011) in relation to the transformation of organizations and the world of work (Aubert & Gaulejac, 1991; Gaulejac, 2005; Gaulejac & Mercier, 2012), the emergence of the Managerial and Numerical Revolution (Gaulejac & Hanique, 2015). More recently, I became interested in the issue of the radicalization of young jihadists who went to fight with the Islamic State in Syria and Europe (Gaulejac & Seret, 2018).

LIST: There are approximately 40 years that you develop research and interventions on changes in the working world. If we compare the reality presented in the book *O poder das organizações* (Pagès et al., 1979, 2019), originally published in 1979, and your reflections presented in the most recent book, published in 2015 together with Fabienne Hanique entitled *Le capitalisme paradoxant: un système qui rend fou*[8] (Gaulejac & Hanique, 2015)*,* what were the main changes observed by you?

Gaulejac: When we published *O poder das organizações* and a few years later, together with Nicole Aubert, *O custo da excelência*, we were referring mainly to multinational organizations. There was a concern in these companies to produce the adhesion of their employees. It was sought to achieve, to some extent, a shared vision with the workers, aimed to play the 'earn reciprocal relationship', in order to put in place some principles on the consideration of workers, based on the people who encountered difficulties. In fact, there was a genuine concern for the human resources directors and for the employers. In any case, this was given in favor of the company's image, but also because these companies were not only interested in the profit, but also by progress. Large companies such as IBM, which we analyzed in *O poder das organizações*, saw themselves as one of the main actors of the transformation of society. Was it fantasy or reality? I think that it was a reality for many people. In any case, many managers and leaders I interviewed believed fully on this and, therefore, they were happy for working in those companies that had a social project and, even, sometimes an ecological project. However, the recent years showed that good social, economic and ecological intentions were swept away by the logic of profit, which imposes its own law worldwide, whether in public organizations or private companies.

The main point of this change is linked to the 'deregulation of financial markets'. That is, the fact that the policies accepted that financial markets are no longer controlled by states and they can be globalized. This was a crucial element in the production of globalization, which enabled financial capitalism to become the essential determinant of the economy. Therefore, the real economy, that is, the production economy, the territorialized economy, the industrial economy, has entirely transformed itself by the requirements of profitability

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[6] This website can be found in this domain: http://www.vincentdegaulejac.com
[7] In French: Réseau International de Sociologie Clinique.
[8] That book has not been translated into Portuguese, yet.

and productivity of share holder value[9]. That is why the financial markets represent a principal element in this context, as they are responsible for determining the capitalist company value. In industrial capitalism, the issue of change was thought from the relationship between Capital and Work. There was a concern about the balance between capital and work in the industry - even considering that Marx has shown that the concern of the capital suppressed concerns about work. Although with difficulties, there was at that time a real project to try to balance things. This was, in short, the social-democratic project.

In hypermodern society, however, financial markets have become omnipotent and management tools have accelerated this process by measuring the set of productive activities by quantitative indicators that could be translated into financial indicators. From that moment, the *share holder value* passed to overlap about other concerns and thus, in the 'Managerialist Newspeak' (Vandevelde-Rougale, 2017)*,* it is said that one must always be aware of the creation of value. However, that value is now no longer the value to the worker, neither the value for a job well done nor the amount related to what is done for ecology, for citizenship, for the diffusion of a productive economic belief or even for the production of a more just and humane society. The value, nowadays, is linked solely to capital profitability.

I did this analysis in the case of IBM, for example. We will republish *O poder das organizações* this year, in Prèsses Universitaires of Belgium (Pagès et al., 1979, 2019) and my friend, Jean Vandewattyne (Université de Mons-UMONS) who took the initiative to this reprint, conducted a little complement research to analyze 'the IBM 40 years later' and even wrote an additional chapter in this new edition. Anyway, 40 years later, there are not those great principles of conciliation and consideration of people. The only principle, currently, relates to attempts to survive in a world in which people are placed in fierce competition with each other and the only concern is to produce value for the company.

In any case, for both the IBM employees and other companies in the world, the logic of profit maximization predominates (which became the critical determinant of the work). Thus, there is pressure for results, a requirement to produce more and more. 'The Managerial Revolution' is represented by Lean Management, 'Total Quality', open space, the race to the merits, the evaluation of performance, finally, by a series of management tools that assess even the smallest activity due to its financial profitability. In turn, this is the determinant of the growth of significant symptoms observed by researchers in Brazil, France, and the United States, around the world, which was called 'psychosocial risks at work', for example, psychosomatic malaise, stress, burnout, nervous depression and even suicide. This phenomenon refers to people who believed that they could be accomplished in work, from economic subsistence security in society (with their salaries and employment), but also in relation to the fulfillment of himself, by prosperity, search for personal development and the interest in doing socially useful things.

Consequently, these beliefs tend to disintegrate upon the loss of meaning in work, the loss of value of the work, which causes people to become more fragile and vulnerable in the psychic and mental field. All of these symptoms illustrate the fact that mental health at work has deteriorated considerably. Moreover, we note that this model, rising at private companies, was imported into the public initiative and, therefore, we observe exactly the same symptoms in these spaces. So, here we state a massive engendered phenomenon in a more significant ideological battle in which, for example, the worker knows his malaise is linked to the work, but the boss, the Human Resources direction and the government, most

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[9] Valor para os acionistas, in Portuguese.

of the time categorically refuse to consider that they possess the minimum responsibility for the burnout, the suicide, the depression at work et so on.

While industrial capitalism accepts their responsibility for occupational diseases (and it took decades), there was at least the worry of saying, "[…] ok, they are occupational diseases […]", that is, diseases related to work situations. Currently, this concern does not exist any longer, although occupational diseases and malaise at work are considerably diffused. So, today there is a substantially important ideological battle among workers, unions and a few political parties, who say that there are new alienation forms, exploitation, pressures at work. Then, it is necessary to rebalance the relationship between Capital and Work - that is, we need to give more attention to the work because people are not well - and then others say that this is a psychological/medical problem. Each worker should be worried about himself; it should not be taken into consideration by companies and government.

All this explains, in particular, a remarkable phenomenon: 'the struggle for places replaces the class struggle' nowadays. In industrial capitalism, there was still class-consciousness. It was conceived that progress gradually should be achieved by social struggles and power relations between employers and workers, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Today, hardly anyone speaks of classwork, or the workers do not even have the energy to face collective battles. They are only concerned about the 'struggle for places', that is, to survive and find a place in this world, since it is vitally necessary to 'find a place' in order to exist in our society. Those who are not included or do not find places are deleted (for example, the refugees, the unemployed and the precarious); they are placed in a dramatic social, psychological and economic condition, so naturally, all people mobilize themselves to prevent such exclusion process. Finally, it should be highlighted that the exclusion processes are also linked to excellence, to this productivity, to the intensified pressure on companies, the evergrowing demands, the always rising requirements, the demands to do more with less. It is then that race straight ahead and towards the profits and productivity that creates significant tensions in the world in which we live.

LIST: The title of your conference in our congress was, 'Why the world of work becomes paradoxical? What are the consequences for people, institutions and politics' In this sense, before a scenario of increasingly paradoxical demands in the world of work, the Clinical Sociology proposes interventions at the level of meta-communications. How to include the work-suffering dimension in this context? Could you talk a little more about the research and Intervention devices in Clinical Sociology?

Gaulejac: Firstly, let me explain what meta-communication is. According to Palo Alto School, to overcome a paradoxical injunction, it is necessary to deconstruct the discursiveness of this injunction. I have not had time to develop in my conference, but I would like to make an addition concerning the child's story[10]. In this case, the child could say to his mother, "Mom, I love you very much and I'm delighted you gave me a gift for my birthday, but I would also like to talk to you, mom, because you put me in a difficult situation

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[10] In his lecture during the congress organized by Subjectivity and Work Interinstutional Laboratory (LIST), Vincent Gaulejac presented an example to elucidate the operating logic of the paradoxical injunctions, in which two radically opposing obligations are placed on the same discursive level of order to prevent the individual leaves the given situation. In the shown example, a mother presents her son with two ties, one red and one green. When his little son puts the green tie, his mother asks him if he did not like the red one, as he chose not to use it. When the son exchanges the tie and returns with the red, she asks him this time if he did not like the green tie. Feeling confused, the son returns to his mother using both overlapping ties. His mother nervously asks him, "Do you want to make me crazy?" This example finally illustrates how a paradoxical injunction always leads to an inability to respond without infringing some of its options.

and I would like to explain to you why. You see ... when I put the red tie, you tell me to put the green one and when I put the green tie; you say I should put the red one. Besides, I do not even know what to do. Then you ask me if I will make you crazy. You´re right, mom, I do not even know what to do. So I propose you... can we talk to someone who can help us to overcome this difficulty?"

This is the meta-communication: the ability to deconstruct the paradox. That competence must be developed within companies in order to help employees and managers to deconstruct the paradoxical injunctions in which they are placed. That is why I defend the idea that we need to build and develop within companies the collective spaces where people can talk about the difficulties that they are facing so that they understand the nature of these difficulties and can take consequences for the organization itself. So, when I intervene in the companies, I usually say, "[…] if you genuinely want to solve this problem, we together will create spaces (in which we call Implication and Research Groups) for this and we will, in turn, work on the conflicts found, for collectively attempt to find solutions that will be put in practice".

For those workers who do not find listening and echo in their workspaces, we create research devices and Clinical Sociology intervention, addressed precisely to those who are suffering at work and will seek answers including outside companies. On the other hand, like unions or political parties do not provide answers to these questions, the individual ends up looking them up next to his psychologist, doctor, et so on. But, at the same time, it produces a very perverse phenomenon, culminating in medicalization and in the psychologizing of social problems (as these problems are, above all, work problems). Admittedly, these people must seek psychological and medical assistance, I am not talking in replacing them here, but to understand that only those means and tools are insufficient because they allow commonly curing the symptoms but not eliminating the causes of these symptoms. In this scenario, I propose the reversal of things. I return to the Clinical Sociology approach, which understands that the issue related to the malaise at work is revealed by its underlying symptoms. However, the core does not consist in eliminating the symptom, but in the work that the subject can do to understand the meanings of this symptom. Also, I understand and I propose that these conflicts are revealing contradictions unresolved in the very organization.

The 'organidramme', in this sense, is a tool that allows the understanding that the conflicts experienced at work are generally the result of contradictions unresolved by the functioning of the organization. Surely, managers and directors have a responsibility here, but it must be stressed that the evolution of the work changes produced a widening gap between the 'actual and prescribed work'. Therefore, we see a great distance between the 'daily managers'[11] who experience the daily work of productive activities, and the 'prescribing managers', commonly responsible for preparing prescriptions, models, standards, processes and redesign of production, along with the large consulting firms and in order to create management tools, performance indicators and evaluation. The latter normalize the premise that the whole economic system must effectively be assessed in terms of quantitative indicators, which in turn translate themselves into financial indicators,

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[11] This is an adapted translation of the concept of *manageur du terrain*, which opposes the *prescripteur manageur*. In the first case refers to managers who have daily contact with their teams and the operation in which it is responsible, that is, the manager who closely know the difficulties encountered by the various levels of complexity of the work of their subordinates. The second category refers to managers who are unaware of the difficulties of their teams' daily work and therefore perform a management mode solely guided by performance and quality indicators, no direct connection to the real productive organization.

which allow translating the value of the company before the financial market. Then, they normalize the power and domination of the financial markets upon the whole of society.

I emphasize the difficulty of making this analysis in policies again. I did it before syndicalism, to other responsible persons (as employers, for example) and even political parties. Most of the time, they have no opposition arguments to what I say, but what they generally say, "[…] okay, okay, we agree". Nevertheless, they do not take out the consequences of this problem, as they feel powerless to change, given the fact that they do not want to give up the paradigms in which they are linked (and paradoxically they contribute to produce this problem). "Now, how to solve a problem within the paradigms that generated it?" That is why the social sciences are so important. It is precisely the theory that helps us to change paradigms.

In 'The Sick Management Society'*,* I tried to show what are the paradigms that founded the management sciences were and I drew up proposals to change these paradigms. The main difficulty is that politicians are predominantly linked to the registration of the action and, soon, they always think that the solution is in action. However, the more they act, the more they reinforce the crisis. They remain in the 'passage to the act', even if we know that the 'passage to the act' corresponds to a related defense mechanism to a problem that has not been resolved. In other words, we know that to 'solve only acting', it does not work. We know this for a long time, since *O poder das organizações.* However, when I say that to a politician, he does not understand, because as the son of the green and the red ties, to understand he would need to deconstruct the discourse: 'why has this not worked?' Politicians, then, are always tied to a growing discourse to fight, for example, against unemployment; therefore, they remain attached to a competitiveness development discourse but do not realize that the development of competitiveness currently involves 'lean management', that is, corresponds to do more with less and less. Moreover, this is the paradox: to combat unemployment, it is necessary to reduce the effective and it does not even have how to work.

LIST: How do you see the development of Clinical Sociology in the world and then in Brazil, currently?
Gaulejac: Well […] in the world, let us be modest [...]

LIST: If we consider that the Clinical Sociology International Network (RISC) in which you are president, has already half of representatives countries [...]
Gaulejac: Of course [...] In fact, I am pleased about it because when I started Clinical Sociology, people did not understand what I meant. At that time, there was the Psychosociology, and some people said that what we were doing was Social Psychology. Anyway, this is not the main. It is called Clinical Sociology, but it could well be called otherwise because it is at first a clinical social-science or a clinical psychosociology. In any case, it is to rethink the disciplinary confinement in favor of acceptance of a 'complexity clinical', that is, to grasp that currently, problems that stand in front of us correspond to us the 'sociopsychic' knots who make it necessary to break the disciplinary barriers among Sociology, Psychology, Psychoanalysis, but also Economics, Management, History and Anthropology. We must truly realize that if we address this complexity, we must understand that man is a 'total social phenomenon' that the relations between Human Being and Society Being are at the heart of these contradictions in the world. Therefore, the idea of Clinical Sociology is effectively not only to bring theoretical tools to understand this but also to

consider that clinical implies the co-construction, a reflective work. It is to 'help individuals to become subjects', able to understand and analyze the contradictions in which they are linked, besides, to understand that the symptoms they experience are the expression of these contradictions. That is why this work is not only a theoretical analysis work but also implies to help and to follow through a clinical approach, people to grasp how internalized the functioning of society. In other words, it is because there is this internalization that individuals need to change, though they often do not want to change, as they hope that society first changes. Now, society does not change by itself if each individual does not also imply a personal change work. Here, at last, a permanent dialectic among social change, individual change, economic change and institutions change.

Then, that complexity clinical demands an analysis work, of theoretical and epistemological reflection, but also methodological, in order to allow professionals to understand the difficulties of individuals who seek them for answers. The RISC tries to develop this conception through the training of these professionals. For years, I had the opportunity, in Social Change Laboratory[12], to guide the arrival of people coming from Russia, Canada, Uruguay, Greece, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, et so on, in search of these methodological tools. In this sense, many researchers were from Brazil and it was great. The first to come to work with us was Norma Takeuti, from Natal (Rio Grande do Norte Capital), then Teresa Carreteiro, from Rio de Janeiro city and soon after several others from other parts. I can not mention here all, but I remember José Newton Garcia de Araújo, Vanessa Andrade Barros and, most recently, even you, Matheus Viana, without forgetting Fernando Gastal de Castro, Pedro Henrique Isaac Silva, Vera Roesler, Ana Massa et so on, totaling more than 50 Brazilians in the last 30 years. Finally, it is essential to mention the work and partnerships made with Christiane Girard, a great friend who has invited me to come to Brazil several times.

All this work also began with Max Pagès, Eugène Enriquez, and Jacqueline Barus-Michel. We were never alone in this adventure. Therefore, it is true that the relationship with Brazil has always been privileged. We appreciate ourselves; we have a way to approach the very next things. In RISC, we have a chance to develop a work with all colleagues from different countries, as we seek above all the co-construction. For example, I am here today and I encourage all of you to use the Brazil page on RISC site (Réseau International de Sociologie Clinique, 2019) to inform everyone else on the set of activities that you perform. The appropriation that we all make of this network is what ensures that it can remain alive and active. In addition, this is precisely what is very interesting and enriching in this congress. We [...] the researchers, academics, clinicians, we must work continuously to overcome disciplinary boundaries, by opening them and with the guarantee of mutual respect in the co-construction of the research in the world. This point is critical, as we see in history that locks and dictatorships have always produced research, education and culture regression. This must be borne in mind because of the RISC [...] I conceive it as a place that fiercely fights determinedly against any types of closures and enclosures.

LIST: Finally, we know that you ever been to Brazil several times, including one of those times you were in Maringá. What impressions did you have on current discussions about political and work issues in our country?

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[12] In 2015, Social Change Laboratory merged the Sociology Center of Practices and Politics Representations, culminating in the creation of Social and Political Change Laboratory, currently linked to the Université Paris-Diderot VII.

Gaulejac: I talked about this a few days ago in Brasilia, because we did a colloquium (6° Colóquio Internacional de Sociologia Clínica e Psicossociologia, 2018) on this issue at that time. When we act from the Clinical Sociology, we have a responsibility to create a setting that allows the execution of clinical analysis and which makes it possible to 'work with violence without violence'. Now, both at the individual level and at the group level, with the 'organidramme', for example, we know which fits necessary, but at the political level, there are no such framings. So we move to the political and critical analysis, which reveal to be relevant from the moment in which they operate in the institutions' framings, for example. I consider that I have no legitimacy to make a judgment about Brazilian policies.

On the other hand, I realize that violence is a reality. It worried everybody and we see that people are not well. Nowadays, there are suicides into workers and students; there are many symptoms that are uncomfortable and make us believe that violence ways are increasing.

I am also moved when I see that everyone seeks to protect himself and, in this context, I believe that significant speeches of political denouncing on this violence are useless or are even counter-productive. Maybe now it is necessary to return to the main and, as a clinician, I know that it is the experience of people. In my opinion, our responsibility is to provide reflective tools of listening and intervention, which allow individuals to be not contaminated by this violence, which often also makes them violent. This is to reflect on how we can create group devices resulting, in turn, in spaces for reflection in which there is an exchange of experiences. Besides, from the collective analysis in these spaces, it must be possible to work on the difficulties they are facing and the existent conflicts so that the generated exchanges allow the creation of means of action at institutions, organizations, research, interventions and, why not, political levels. That is why I am very engaged in the *Manifesto dos Convivialistas* (Convivialisme, 2019)*,* for example, which was translated into Portuguese (Manifesto Convivialista, 2019) and corresponds to a non-violent political proposition, but at the same time realistic. Finally, we always need to nourish the hope of building a better world.

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