

Sanity & Identity

Repressive Society's Sleight of Hand

Bryan Tucker

A tentative existence is what society's current trajectory offers us: alienation from others simultaneous with chronic concern about perception by others. Futile attempts to persist in these conditions takes the form of claiming an identity, espousing sanctioned banalities, and various other nonsense that renders us drained and pained.

As children we desire(d) to be all; vicious, piercing, silent, delicate, inflated, microscopic. But in traditional child development processes, longings and impulses are cut back and compartmentalized as adaptation to authority, appearance, competition, and morality results in a reduction of possible and actual activity.

The consequences of standard development, facilitated by family, state, and capital, is reduction into a rigid condition of atomized being termed ego, identity, or self. The trauma of this transformation is characterized by a handover of power to authority and the status quo, by the uniformization of demeanors and mentalities, and by repeated expression of what we are obligated to express.

Shame, fear of punishment, and innate tendencies to satisfy the expectations of adults, incline children to identify with an ego or a self-image, and thus to become oriented towards outer appearance.

Jacques Lacan, a 20th century psychoanalyst whose ideas influenced countless radical thinkers, theorized that what is conventionally thought of as ego is an alien force adopted by children due to coercion and seduction by the Other (i.e., law, language, and social structure), and that over time, kids learn to speak the Other's discourse in order to have needs met.

The civilizing, brutalizing processes that regulate adult lives and expedite child development, have the effect of turning most people into a repository of predictable ways of being with emphases upon window dressings and chronic ignorance of the monstrous remainders (e.g., pollution, poverty).

This forging of a unified, singular identity diminishes the multiplicities, intricacies, and incongruities of which people are comprised. State, capital, and family controls are contingent upon practices which transform people into frigid, disembodied entities that conceal depth and luminosity and the various inhabitants within.

In their 1972 *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari posit that schizophrenic processes are potentially revolutionary, pointing out that many on the receiving end of the label schizo are fundamentally those who "can no longer bear the money, the stock market, the death forces...the morals, homelands, religions, and private certitudes."

A primary purpose for their writings was to demonstrate the societal and historical quality of schizophrenia. Individual attempts to create outside prevailing boundaries, to reject identification or classification, to refuse participation in production/consumption fixated society, often get labeled as schizophrenic.

Humans (and likely most perceptive organisms) are hallucinatory beings, and in early childhood, hallucinated images are regularly substituted for tangible objects.

In the *Crimes of Perception* booklet, author and activist Ben G. Price points out that within civilization's parameters only certain hallucinations are permissible. Those include auditory ones which instruct the subject as to which perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors are admissible and which are forbidden.

While capable of alluding to the notion that the current order doesn't offer a way out of itself, hallucination can also confer perceptual renewal and coincide with perspectival shifts into intensifying, spreading, complexifying conscious awareness.

Expansive hallucinatory states, ones with which people diagnosed with schizophrenia are often familiar, are normally concerned with authentic problems of self and other, meaning and meaninglessness, infinity and death, and are revelatory of the illusoriness and deception of the categories and declarations that authorities attempt to insert into our lives (such as identity, fandom, and voting). They help shine lights on the continual sidetracking and vitality draining of the surveys, the spaces to comment, the lines, fees, pin codes, pills, passwords, confirmations, conservatorships, reviews, updates, assessments, treatments, evaluations, re-evaluations, and exit evaluations.

It is fascinating that psychosis frequently rejects empire's isolative uniformity and embraces difference. In undifferentiated states (i.e., psychotic, psychedelic) socially constructed differences often disappear and equivalency between people/all become apparent.

Subtle qualities of schizophrenia (that are ordinarily termed "negative symptoms") tend to be social or anti-social in nature: decrease in speech and conversing (including lack of interest in or capacity for small talk), reactions that are considered inappropriate or unfitting (as determined by authority), and minimal interest in existing/ available activities. It is relevant to note that much societal indoctrination and uniformization occurs via requirements that subordinates give certain types of responses to communications spoken by authorities.

Radical psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich found that after three decades of doing a "thorough study of schizophrenic minds, that they look through our hypocrisy, our cruelty and stupidity, our fake culture, our evasiveness, and our fear of the truth." Many other social critics have commented on the ways in which people that are society's casualties, those ordinarily viewed as broken and insignificant, can possess a profound capacity to expose the powers that confine, repress, and neutralize.

In the 1960s and '70s, attempts were made to reappropriate terminology connected with schizophrenia as well as to establish radical approaches to interactions with people labeled mentally ill. The anti-psychiatry movement came to prominence during this period wherein therapeutic communities were established that attempted to give workers and patients equal status.

The La Borde clinic in France aimed to circumvent authoritarianism and bureaucracy and to be run in a democratic fashion, and Kingsley Hall in England, where residents were encouraged to give in to madness, were the most prominent spaces of anti-psychiatry experiments. R.D. Laing (the most well-known figure in this movement and resident of Kingsley Hall) maintained that Freud's most important contribution was "his insight and demonstration that the ordinary person is a shriveled fragment of what a person can be."

In 1975, the Schizo-Culture conference was held at Columbia University, an event that included avant-garde artists and musicians, poets and writers, individuals from the anti-psychiatry movement, radical French philosophers, prison activists, Black Panthers, ex-cons, people diagnosed with schizophrenia, anarchists and political radicals, and experimental theater groups.

One purpose was to transform the connotations of the schizo concept; to use it in reference to opposition to social isolation and the imposition of identity, to challenge societal procedures that standardize, and to negate systems that dominate through the enforcement of self-definition.

The conference was arranged to assist writers, patients, prisoners, and others to unite in order to connect up their ideas and practices related to such things as madness, drugs, and creation in order to form new social relations and break down barriers between theories, practices, and fields, as well as to work on bringing down prison and asylum walls. Many of those participating were interested in and contributors to what is known as the Revolution of Desire.

With the current level of uncertainty/precarity in contemporary social conditions, it is an understatement to say that mental anguish is mushrooming. And, with mainstream paradigms fundamentally off the mark, deterioration will continue to expand and deepen. A case in point is the interrupting and medicating of processes that should be permitted to run their course, which is a hallmark of present-day corporate driven treatment approaches to schizo phenomena. There is an immense amount to be learned from the movements and individuals that pushed for social change and alternative approaches to conceptualizing societies, humans, manifestations of the psyche, and mental pain a half century ago.

Bryan Tucker enjoys pursuing various schizo-experimental endeavors and hanging out with his cat. Over the past dozen years, he has been involved with multiple social equality movements and projects in the San Francisco Bay area.

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/404-summer-2019/sanity-identity>
Fifth Estate #404, Summer, 2019

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