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FROM PERRUCHE AFFAIR TO PAUL BLANC'S REPORT. CURRENT DEBATES ON THE HANDICAP IN FRANCE

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CONSTITUTING BOUNDARIES WITHIN MENTAL HEALTH CARE: TENSIONS, HIERARCHIES AND THE POLITICS OF DISTRIBUTION

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The oscillation between action as determined and action as determining has been a major feature of social theory and one which theorists have tried to overcome within their work. For example, rather than reducing action merely to an individual agent or member of the collective, or to the effect of the structure or system, action is viewed the performance of a specific collective (Gomart & Hennion, 1999). This is illustrated by the work of Suchman (1987) in which she describes the way in which situated action must be understood in terms of collective action. Thus, rather than viewing 'interests' and 'norms' as stable, these must be examined with regard to the local situations in which the continual process of constitution and accomplishment takes place. This focus on situated action clearly links to the ways in which boundaries and tensions relating to competing notions of practice are constituted and negotiated. For instance, Garfinkel provides an interesting illustration within his analysis of clinical practice, in terms of the tensions between the situated or everyday practices of clinicians, and practices of accounting and management, such as form-filling. This paper seeks to examine a range of problems and issues relating to the production of accounts and the constitution of boundaries by focusing on the relationship between practices, actions, subject/object positions and relations. For instance, writers such as Callon and Latour have suggested that within an ethnomethodological approach insufficient emphasis is placed on the presence of objects, as ethnomethodologists are still concerned with the interaction of subject and object, human and non-human, agent and structure (Gomart &

Hennion, 1999:245). Moreover, Gomart & Hennion suggest rather than undoing the model of human action, the situated-action approach is viewed as merely allowing the cognitive capacities of humans to migrate to objects. In particular, they suggest that the focus should be upon the process of mediation and the way in which object-mediators (which are rendered as prolongations of actions already initiated elsewhere) do not merely relay and repeat actions, but also transform them in different and sometimes surprising ways. Thus, events are not limited to origins, determinants or effects... "as mediation is a turn towards what emerges, what is shaped and composed, what cannot be reduced to an interaction of causal objects and intentional persons. The network is not a black pool in which to drop, dilute, criticise, and lose the subject. It is on the contrary an opening - pried lose with a partly rhetorical liberation of things and an attentiveness to spaces, dispositions, and events - which releases us from the insoluble opposition between natural determination and human will. 'Mediation' allows the course of the world to return to the centre of analysis" (Gomart & Hennion, 1999:226). In other words, each element of the network 'relays' and 'prolongs' the action of the collective without being the source itself. Thus the capacity to be strategic should be described as the effect of an association of a heterogeneous network and not merely assigned to a human actor (Callon and Latour, 1997). In contrast, others critique this focus on processes (Button 1993) and suggest that such an approach fails to fully examine the various techniques and embedded working practices with respect to the way they emerge concurrently in relation to other elements within the network. Furthermore, this approach is criticised with regard to problems of inclusion and exclusion, the cutting of the network, and finally, the issue of how do you speak on behalf of others within these complex networks of relations and how do we understand the issue of power and politics in terms of the constitution of boundaries. In particular, this paper seeks to examine this final issue in relation to the process by which certain boundaries are presupposed and constituted with a focus upon the role of specific information practices underlying the organization and management of mental health care. For example, this will include reviewing the role of the CPA and needs assessment with regard to relations between different disciplinary groups (e.g. social workers and clinicians), and patients and clinicians. More specifically we will examine the process by which these approaches attempt to overcome a range of problems relating to disciplinary boundaries underlying mental health care and the role they play in reconstituting these boundaries, relations and practices in complex and uncertain ways. The empirical research which forms the basis for this study was performed in a local NHS hospital trust. An ethnographic style of research was conducted which involved working within the mental health department on a number of projects including the development and application of the CPA and the needs assessment process. This case study thus provides some interesting and insightful illustrations of the changing relations between various groups and individuals involved in the process of mental health care and in particular a range of issues relating to the production of credible/legitimate accounts and the constitution of boundaries. One specific aspect we wish to examine in relation to this process concerns the hierarchies of distribution and the ordering of accounts. For instance, while we may talk about the role of heterogeneous engineers in the process of network building and translation (Law 1997), heterogeneity is quite different for those who are privileged and those who are not (Star 1991). Thus, the ways in which distributions of power and a multiplicity of completing truths are recursively woven into the complex set of relations that underlie particular circulations of actors (Law 1997), is an area which requires further and more detailed examination. Rather than examining accounts as providing the 'truth' or merely telling a 'story', it is vital to examine the way in which some distributions

and truths take precedence and become stable features of the setting compared to others, the different forms resistance that may emerge (see Fujimura 1991; Star 1991), and the ways in which certain object/subject positions and boundaries are presupposed and constituted. In particular, this paper will examine these questions in relation to the role of information practices in framing representations of the past and the sequencing of events in the present, especially when one group's visibility comes at the expense of another's suffering, or where what might be considered as the categories of the powerful become partially embedded within certain practices and artifacts and taken for granted as given (Bowker and Star, 1999:320). For instance, Law (1997) states that a celebration of diversity is an empty gesture without the presence of a politics that establishes the conditions for its exercise. While he may suggest that we should seek to distinguish what is right from what is wrong at a local level, how do we actually achieve this in practice? For instance, while boundaries, orderings and classifications are required in order to access the 'past', 'present' and 'future', it is important that the development and stabilization of standards and classifications are not taken as universal or given. In other words, there needs to be room to examine this process in more detail without relying on a priori notions of time, representation (see Lynch and Woolgar, 1990), and universality. One way to start thinking around this issue involves examining the way in which we live in a world of complex and partially connected orderings (Haraway 1991b; Strathern 1991) that may support, undermine and generally interfere with each other in different and uncertain ways and based on alternative notions of spacing and timing (Law 1997). Thus, it is not possible to grasp an ordering as if one singular or transparent time or flat space exists, as our world is one of multiplicities of interconnectedness and in order to recognize this within our accounts we need new ways of 'knowing' and 'speaking about' these distributions without flatterning difference into pluralism. Additionally, clearly no piece of social research can ever be amoral or apolitical. However, the way in which we either explicitly or implicitly deal with such issues is crucial, and needs to be considered further if we are to understand the implications surrounding notions of politics, ethics, distributions, and the making of judgements in our accounts (Hull, 1999). Thus, with the aid of illustrations from an ethnographic study performed within a mental health department, this paper will explore these issues in further depth. In particular, this will involve focusing on the practices of needs assessment, and the role of a specific form-filling process in constituting subject and object positions (in terms of both patients and mental health workers), the ways in which competing truths undermine, support and within complex networks of relations, and the problems relating to the production of accounts which neither rely on claims of objectivity or independence, but remain as a credible in terms of the accounting process.

COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE IN ITALY

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