

Antonietta Bernardoni: Introduction Presentation of the Book "Psychiatry Without a Future"

– San Faustino Neighborhood - July 25, 1975

Summary

Doctor Antonietta Bernardoni presents the book "Psychiatry Without Future" 1975 during an event in the San Faustino Neighborhood, highlighting the importance of a popular therapeutic approach to create connections between previously isolated people.

00:10

Moderator (President of the Neighborhood Health and Social Security Commission): So we can begin, before starting I wanted to convey the greetings of the outgoing councilor for social services who telephoned this afternoon saying that he could not participate in this assembly saying that in any case formally, that is, not formally, it is as if he were present, also saying that he read with great interest the book that will be presented this evening.

00:51

As head of the Health and Social Security Commission of the Neighborhood I have been entrusted and have this pleasant task of introducing Dr. Antonietta Bernardoni, a pleasant task and also how embarrassing and difficult, I say pleasant because now the friendships that bind me to Antonietta Bernardoni I don't say long-standing but quite concrete and profound, I say embarrassing because here we are presenting Antonietta Bernardoni, it's not easy, it's not easy because her activities, her commitment in the political and scientific fields and

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the vastness of the speeches she carries out do not allow for a short speech, above all, here and I intended to be as brief as possible to give space to Dr. Bernardoni's speech and the debate that will follow, however here I feel the obligation precisely as head of the Health and Social Security Commission to give a brief overview and some considerations on the activity carried out by the Commission in the last period of time, I say for a year and a half now, for a year and a half now, it is no coincidence because it has been for about a year and a half that

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between the Health and Social Security Commission of the neighborhood and the Human Relations group that operates in the neighborhood began a relationship of close collaboration, a relationship of close collaboration that led to a decisive qualitative and also quantitative leap forward in the activity of the Commission itself from a rather episodic, fragmentary type of activity carried out by a few volunteers in this case were precisely the volunteers, they tried to make up for the lack of forces that

03:14

were in the neighborhood with their everyday commitment, we moved on to a real mobilization from below of all the forces that are in the neighborhood, but I say this leap forward in quality as I was saying and this new way of operating did not happen by chance, it happened because certain discussions were

matured and acquired within the neighborhood which were carried forward in the Human Relations group in the neighborhood which were then those that Dr.

03:54

Bernardoni carries out: they are those of popular therapy and this term has been discussed, much has been said, much has been theorized, we in San Faustino have put it into practice in the everyday activity of the Health Commission and Social Security but to materialize it was necessary for the forces available to the neighborhood to increase, to increase more and more, that it was no longer a form of generic volunteering as it was before but that it was a real mobilization from below of all the forces that are in the neighborhood

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this mobilization can only be held on concrete cases, tackling concrete cases and trying to resolve them in a concrete way. We first moved along this path with a bit of difficulty because it is clear that the discussion had to be acquired and matured by everyone, now the results are there and can be seen and demonstrable.

05:13

Here, with this type of mobilization it has also been possible to materialize the programmatic lines of the Municipal Administration and the Provincial Administration, programmatic lines which however remain as such as there is a lack of alternative concrete tools to carry them forward. For some time the municipal and provincial administrations have followed the policy of deinstitutionalization or at least non-institutionalization with regards to elderly people and childhood, this is evident because locking up an elderly person, locking up a child in an institution first and foremost has a high human cost and on this

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I think it is useless to dwell on the high human cost that these segregated people have to pay because after all this is the term even in structures that are as perfect as possible advanced, but which nevertheless isolate and uproot the person from his natural social environment. Secondly, there is the economic aspect, the very high cost of these hospitalizations in these institutions.

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This is a policy that has been carried out by the most advanced local administrations for some time, but very often there is a lack of alternative tools to avoid these institutionalizations because it is done quickly. say deinstitutionalize but if these people are not given the opportunity to remain in their social environment it is clear that all this remains pure theory and we here in San Faustino have resolved various cases of this type, parents who asked for their children to be admitted to institutions for childhood or even a parent who asked for the institutionalization of the

07:26

children precisely because of the mobilization of forces that was managed to materialize in San Faustino it was possible to avoid these hospitalizations these children remained in their homes, the same goes for the elderly people, that type of home care that the Municipality of Modena has planned and is carrying out on an experimental basis, but objectively we all know with what difficulties with what difficulties, and the objective limits that there are, financial, of local finance and what is a reality that we experience

08:07

every day and then also especially regarding the lack of specialized personnel who should be hired to do this type of work. Specialized personnel but it does not necessarily have to be specialized personnel for this type of work, because here in San Faustino we do not use specialized personnel, we use citizens who make available a small part or a large part of their time to resolve these types of cases and I think that whoever received the invitation by post also received, the invitation to this meeting,

08:51

also a document that the Health and Social Security Commission made last month, that is, inviting the citizens of the neighborhood to make a small part of their time available because it is important, I think also precisely for a discussion of personal growth of acquiring certain problems, well, then verifying them in person, that is, coming to the neighborhood not only to hear the speech at the assembly but then participate in an active and concrete way in the neighborhood life that takes place every day.

09:31

It takes place every day. It is no coincidence that the San Faustino neighborhood will perhaps be the only neighborhood. In fact, without a doubt, it will be the only neighborhood in Modena that will not close in the month of August, it will not close because it will have to carry on all those activities that have already started, I am referring for example to the activities that take place every afternoon with the children and here I refer to those who participated, many of you will have participated in the meetings we held on the Paolo Ferrari schools

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there were seven children from the neighborhood of the Paolo Ferrari schools, Paolo Ferrari special schools, which the neighborhood had committed to making people attend normal schools. It was an undertaking as far as scholastic inclusion was concerned but it was a discussion that obviously could not be limited to scholastic inclusion but also to the social recovery of these children who had been kept segregated for so many years, I repeat the term because it is more true than ever, segregated in these

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institutions. Three assemblies were held in the months of May and June on the subject, attended by citizens, members of the school, educational clubs, principals, teachers, pupils, parents and the result of these assemblies was precisely this, that it was necessary to overcome these structures, to overcome them definitively.

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because old and worn out, they were born in 1928 so if I'm not mistaken in the sixth year of the fascist era, right? And they are still standing. It was necessary to overcome them but to overcome them it was necessary to create valid alternatives. And we as a neighborhood are committed to collaborating with the school for this social inclusion and recovery and we are keeping faith with this commitment because every afternoon these children from Paolo Ferrari with other children from the neighborhood come here to carry out recreational activities they have

12:02

work groups study and benefit from the existing structures in the neighborhood, I am referring to this one hall to the library and the municipal gym. Literacy courses for adult workers, especially southern workers, are also being organized and will begin after mid-August and in September we will also organize remedial courses for those children who had particular difficulties during the past s

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chool year. Now it's not that we want to suffer with this or we want... we want to replace schools with other institutions. No, just that we all know what the difficulties are regarding the generalization of full-time school, they are objective difficulties that exist and at this point we feel obliged as a neighborhood to make available the forces that we have managed to mobilize to resolve these cases, concrete cases here This is the new way of conceiving activity in the neighborhood.

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In fact some still call it the Health and Safety Commission, we say that we would like it to be called what it is actually called the Health and Social Security Commission because it is not so much towards an old outdated type of assistance that we want to continue to go, we this type of existence we want to overcome it and create a concrete social security, social security by which the concept of the monetization of need is overcome because until today very often due to the lack of concrete alternatives the need was monetized so

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I am referring for example to the discussion I was making before, to the issue of institutionalization, instead of admitting the child to an institution, very often the family was given an economic contribution which varied according to the needs of the family as if then, always and in any case, the situation of need of necessity of the family had been of an economic nature, indeed very often it wasn't but there were no other alternatives it was necessary to follow that path and the so-called subsidy was provided, a generic subsidy which

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we here in San Faustino would like to see overcome because we think that in the meantime absolutely, as an aid intervention economic, we think that in many cases it can be overcome, when and how: if on the one hand there is an economic need and on the other there is a need for home care, I am referring above all to elderly people here at this point we can combine the two things and this is what we actually do in San Faustino.

16:02

There is a person who needs to work today we know the difficulties there are, he finds himself in economic difficulties and on the other hand if the elderly person needs assistance we send this person to help this elderly person so on the one hand hospitalization is avoided of the elderly on the other hand you avoid that type of subsidy that is very often begging which rarely solves the problems you instead pay the person who pays you for the work they do here what I was saying is intended to be a brief very brief overview of the type of activity that is carried out in San Faustino, I repeat that we have managed to achieve certain results

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precisely because we have developed certain discussions within the Health and Social Security Commission which today has more than 50 members, which started from the Human Relations group and precisely thanks to this type of activity that we are carrying out, we have also managed to involve in the discussion other groups and associations that exist in the neighborhood and that operate in this sector.

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I am referring for example to the parish nurseries or the league of pensioners who are part of and actively participate in the everyday work of our commission. Having said this, I felt the duty to do so because it is a fair and proper recognition that must be given to people who have been using their best strengths every day in our neighborhood for more than 2 years. I think I can give the floor directly to Doctor Bernardoni, after which we will start the debate.

18:03

ANTONIETTA BERNARDONI: I thought I'd start my speech in a certain way but then afterwards I feel that now I have to say this fundamental thing, that is, start from another part of my speech, that is, that Popular Therapeutic Activity, that's what we call this conscious action of ours to create bonds between people who had been isolated from the life system that we are leading, this Popular Therapeutic Activity of ours is the result of collective work and therefore the fact that my name is brought forward

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immediately leads to this clarification. That is, no one can do anything, no isolated man, no isolated woman can carry on any significant discussion and so I would like to say this: that is, everything that has been done has been done together by friends, companions and even adversaries, sometimes even a good adversary helps to better clarify the terms of our discussion.

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So I will read something that I had written, fearing that I would not be able to carry on the discussion in an immediate and spontaneous manner. But even if I read something I invite people to interrupt me freely and ask their questions freely. When someone requests the attention of others, even for a short time, the others have the right to ask them: why do you ask for our attention, what purpose did you come to speak to us, for this reason, before explaining the contents of my speech I would like to answer briefly to these questions even if they were not

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formulated directly, exposing my motivations. Why did I come to speak to you? Why am I here this evening? I am here fundamentally for the purpose of looking for allies, to look for allies for a struggle without participating in which one cannot be a man and a woman of our time, it is the struggle that exists between the Popular Therapeutic Activity which is today laboriously coming to light and the psychiatry which is now in an irreversible crisis and it doesn't matter whether it is old psychiatry or new psychiatry we write the word new when it refers

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to psychiatry we always write it in quotation marks so-called new, we don't think that a new psychiatry exists just as it doesn't exist modern slavery should exist if it is not well disguised, just as we cannot think

of a more comfortable concentration camp, psychiatry, that is, the art of devaluing men, has no right to citizenship .

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Now I would like to say that the practice and theory that led to a first identification of the fundamental features of Popular Therapeutic Activity, that is to say the Science of the mutual valorization of the personality of the exploited, are not an individual work but rather a collective one, therefore we call our group Relationships Humans, we define our Popular Therapeutic Activity as the Science of the mutual valorization of the personality of the exploited, and I was saying that this science that is being born is not an individual work but rather a collective one, even if due to

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the coincidence of a series of circumstances, partly fortuitous and partly deliberately pursued, The beginning of practice and theorization can be traced back first to a single researcher, then to a small collective, then to communities that are continually growing in number and size, communities that will be able to ensure that a private re-appropriation of what has been socially produced.

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It should be noted that from the beginning, in 1949, even when it appeared that only I was involved in the critical investigation relating to the formation and deformation of the personality of men and women of rights [...] the mentally ill, it was already possible for me to initiate and carry forward in fact in the light of the class struggle a demolishing criticism of the falsifications of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychology solely as a result of a Marxist vision of the world as well as the belief connected to this vision that the human essence is not something abstract which is immanent to the single individual

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in his reality is the set of social relationships. From the first encounter with psychiatry and its victims in the fifth year of medical studies, this belief immediately led to a clear rejection of the medicalization of psychiatry as a false science that presumes to cure in the individual what is not in the individual but outside of it although the interactions of the social over the biological nor those of the biological over the social.

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From the first observations and from the first critical reflections relating to the absolute inability of the so-called psychiatric science to transform and understand the external situation of individuals and therefore to cure their internal suffering, it became clear to me that the anomalies of the personality and behavior of those who are diagnosed as mentally ill are in no way connected, except for a minimal percentage of cases deriving from organic lesions, with situations internal to the corporeity of the subject himself but with

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external situations only by modifying which it is possible to treat and heal the so-called mental illness so I focus on this point: only by modifying the situations external to the subject is a cure for the so-called mental illness obtained, then it is clear that the mental illness is not inside the subject, true, this is the basic fact that we have experienced hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times, it was by modifying the

environment, for this reason from the beginning my commitment was aimed towards a real transformation and a concrete examination of the specific life situations

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in which those who found themselves in difficulties mistakenly considered to be personal nature and of psychiatric relevance. The result of this form of intervention, based not on a therapy of a falsely medical nature centered on the subject in difficulty as if he were the carrier of an illness to be cured, but rather based on an active modification of external situations, immediately made it possible to obtain, in relatively short short, stable healings, healings I put it in quotes because there was no illness inside them, when the environment changed the person who was

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considered sick was no longer sick. I repeat that I consider this statement of mine that this statement of mine can refer to the vast majority of cases, of course I am a doctor and I know very well that there are epileptic subjects but also epileptic subjects have very different manifestations depending on whether they have good friends or have bad companions or live in complete isolation.

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So I know very well that there are arteriosclerotic subjects, I know very well that all of us, if we are lucky enough to live until late, will have manifestations of this character. But I repeat that in the vast majority of cases it was the modification of the external environment which means, for example, having simply sometimes begun to discuss with people with whom we had the wrong relationships who were nevertheless important people for our life, that's what I mean.

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Returning to the beginning of this criticism demolishing in facts, not in theory, not in words, in facts, I said of psychiatry that not as a doctor but as a companion of the exploited I gave my contribution to the mobilization and connection of human forces that became increasingly adequate through processes of criticism and self-criticism to concretely modify power relations, balances and external situations in a manner favorable to the person in difficulty, who took on the role of protagonist more and more and better as his strengths continued to grow.

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of their own liberation because the protagonists of their own liberation can only be individuals in difficulty supported however by a mobilization and connection of human forces as broad and deep as possible which encourages them and helps them to change the environment in which they live.

33:04

It is an attitude marked by maximum trust in concrete men in their ability to know themselves and others with the help of their companions and in their potential for growth and mutual help, trust associated with a critical understanding of the exploitation of oppression of the unequal power relations that exist in capital society. There is no point in studying many books on psychiatry if you don't know what exploitation is we know what situations it leads to if we do not know the disintegration of the families of loved ones which takes place under the pressure of the needs which are not the needs of the subject.

34:04

We see the suffering of the workers who come from the south to look for work in our city, we see the lack of understanding that we very often have towards them, we see that these are sufferings that are connected to socio-economic situations, not to organic situations.

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For example, when a laborer from the lower Modena plain married to an unemployed alcoholic was forced to abandon her children in the hands of the employer's charity in order to go to the Vercelli area to earn a little money and a sack of rice essential for her survival and Upon her return she found that her children indoctrinated by charitable institutions despised her for her vision of the world, for her swear words, for her irreducible ability to fight and so in a case like this I asked myself, were these the first cases I had seen in many , many years? 26 years ago, I asked myself, was there perhaps a need, as certain

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psychoanalysis books teach us, to investigate the Oedipus complex of this farm worker or that of her children to understand the desperation resulting from the unsustainable concrete situation in which she found herself immersed? Was it necessary to look into the old legends or was it not necessary to look firmly and critically at the environment that surrounded him? Could a Marxist doctor perhaps forget the socioeconomic roots and the political meaning of such a situation, mystifying the terms through a medical-psychiatric nomenclature that clearly aimed to place

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the consequences of the current production relations on the worker by blaming him after exploiting him? Another example: a sixteen-year-old peasant girl who lives in a patriarchal family says she is constantly threatened by two elderly relatives who live with her.

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The only person capable of understanding her anguish as well as concretely defending her would be her mother who, however, is almost completely deaf, hospitalized in a neuropsychiatric clinic for delusional episodes, so the doctors said, during which she imagined being taken to hell together to her uncles, the girl had never felt any benefit from the therapy performed.

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The other doctors had never considered his story other than as a symptom of the disease. Some psychiatrists who had seen her previously had made psychoanalytic diagnoses which had never helped her in any way. Instead, listening with profound respect to the young peasant's statements without drawing in any way on similar categories of a psychiatric, psychoanalytic or medical nature but drawing only on the knowledge of the structures and superstructures of our society and the effects of exploitation, I limited myself to advising the mother to the purchase of

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a hearing aid and an acoustic horn so that she could hear better so that upon returning home her daughter began to be able to confide in herself and feel protected as well as to be able to ask for the necessary help

from time to time, from that moment on the girl did not he never again presented any noteworthy disorder.

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That is, I want to tell you here according to the other doctors there was something wrong with the brain, now how did the girl recover? she recovered by purchasing a hearing aid for her mother. I have not given her any other therapy of any other type, as we put it, that is, this medicalization of psychiatry, that is, these desperate human situations must be looked at with medical schemes or we must go and see what is new in that house, like what relationships occur if there is a husband who is poorly paid and who spends the little bit of desperation he has at the tavern and then comes home and beats his wife,

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I have to look at something that isn't working in the wife's brain or of the husband or should I look at exploitative relationships? In my opinion, the concept of exploitation is the fundamental concept for understanding everything that takes place in the field of psychiatry. So that's it I say psychiatry without a future without a future, these gentlemen doctors these dear colleagues who charge 20 30 50,000 lire when a friend, a neighbor, a companion could understand the situation infinitely better and then there is no future for the medicalisation of psychiatry. That is, is it clear

41:36

that there are people whose desperation is such that they have a bad connection with themselves, with others and with the surrounding environment and so I go looking inside them? no, I'm going to look around them and I'm going to look for the repercussions that these extreme difficulties have on them .

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In this case, as in countless other cases, the person in difficulty mistakenly considered to be of a personal nature and of psychiatric relevance actually only needed something concrete to change in the external world, not something within himself, something concrete, of course, then his state of certainly his capacity for initiative would certainly have changed something inside but first I had to look outside to be able to achieve this change.

42:59

Now I want to tell you that exploitation is the basic concept for understanding behavioral disorders if this, as in many years of experience, applies to me it is proven true and there has been proof of demonstrable verifiable facts so why do all these stories about mental illness continue, why is this a big problem that we have to ask ourselves and since I didn't deal with it in my notes I want to simply tell you I want to draw your attention

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very quickly to this, that is, to the enormous usefulness it has for the capitalist system for the person to continually look inside himself, blaming himself that the person's attention if for example at a certain moment I forget a watch, if I know that psychiatry is a false science if I etc.

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but if someone has put the fear of mental illness in me I start saying today I forgot my watch, yesterday I lost my purse but maybe there is something in me that it does not work. That is, being afraid of becoming mentally ill is one of the most important tools of terrorism against workers, workers must know that the Central Nervous System is an extremely protected organ, that we only use a part of the nerve cells we possess and even if some of these is damaged there are those that replace them while in the medical texts of a few years ago it was said

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that nerve cells do not reproduce now we know that nerve cells reproduce therefore we know that we have great support in knowing the world for put ourselves in relationships with friends and comrades, but if we don't have trust, the relationship collapses, that is, we isolate ourselves or we don't oppose the isolation in which the capitalist system continually tries to place us.

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So I will summarize by talking to you about my initial experience of my refusal from the beginning of the so-called psychiatric knowledge as a point of reference for understanding the alterations in the personality and behavior of those who turned to me for help, instead judging the transformation to be of extreme importance. concrete situations external to the subject, the transformation and analysis conducted together with the protagonist had as their object current situations, real life problems and were oriented towards the future even if sometimes the ways in which the child who as such at the moment of birth

48:07

belongs to all of humanity, is then gradually but often inexorably conditioned to be a member of his own class, that is, conditioned to be exploited or exploiter. Already then, I was deeply interested in the problems connected with the fact that sometimes the exploited, through a process of degradation defined as social climbing, can reach the class of exploiters, just as belonging to the dominant classes can sometimes reach stand alongside the militants of the working class. In the light of the class struggle the monotonous repetitive events that according to the

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doctrine developed by Freud for the benefit of the dominant classes, they leave their mark on the life of every individual regardless of the era and the social class to which they belong, they are flattened into insignificant shadows inadequate to interpret the real personality of the concrete men who make history.

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Many young people wish to get closer to the knowledge of concrete men and many do so through readings, one of the readings which undoubtedly, instead of enriching, impoverishes tremendously the human world is the reading of Freud who interprets every attitude and every word of the individual whether he is considered healthy or it is considered mentally ill as a symptom of something else and therefore the result of the study of Freud's work which fascinates many young people because it gives the illusion

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of explaining many things and in reality it does nothing but hide an enormous phenomenon which is the phenomenon of exploitation, therefore since it gives the illusion of explaining many things many young

people approach the work of this ambitious Viennese doctor who above all wanted to achieve glory not understanding that the greatest glory is the one that all of us can achieve indifferently dedicating ourselves to promoting processes that move towards the future and towards a transformation of society.

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There are many things I have to say to you, but I think it is right that I shorten my speech as much as possible to leave a lot of time for discussion, so I will limit myself to reading some notes relating to what I would have liked to express in greater detail, that is, some points for example the one relating to the inability of medicine to provide a real interpretative key to the value of the intrinsic meaning of a human life, this goes beyond medicine, medicine cannot explain this, medicine can explain many things, that is, I would like to tell you that my

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criticism which is a radical criticism of psychiatry does not in any way deny the value of knowledge relating to the healthy and sick body and also to the healthy and sick nervous system but this is not psychiatry, we are speaking here who want to remain within the scope of scientific medicine we are talking about Higher Nervous Activity, we are not talking about the psyche, the psyche, the psyche is a bastard concept which is not good, as I have often said, it is not good for Marxists or Catholics, Catholics, Christians in general,

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it is not it's fine because Christians believe in an immortal soul which obviously has supports during earthly life, those like me who are not Christians believe if they want to enter into the scope of what is scientific about Higher Nervous Activity, the concept of psyche is good neither for Christians nor for Marxists, the concept of psyche is only good for bourgeois capitalism because three false sciences, false or falsifying sciences, are based on it : psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psychology and I make a

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certain difference when I say falsifying It doesn't mean that there isn't some notion that doesn't respond to the truth but it means that it is in any case falsifying because it diverts the subject's attention from looking at what are the true causes of people's discomfort and suffering.

55:40

[Transcription from audio cassettes 1A, 1B, of 25 July 1975 - Presentation of the book "Psychiatry without Future" at Sala Quartiere San Faustino - Modena] [Realized by: Antonietta Bernardoni Collective - Modena (IT), July 2024]